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BOOKS BY E. TEMPLE THURSTON

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RICHARD FURLONG

THE ANTAGONISTS

THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE

THE APPLE OF EDEN

TRAFFIC

THE REALIST

THE EVOLUTION OF KATHERINE

MIRAGE

SALLY BISHOP

THE GREATEST WISH IN THE WORLD

THE PATCHWORK PAPERS

THE GARDEN OF RESURRECTION

THE FLOWER OF GLOSTER

THIRTEEN

Not in
6-14-21
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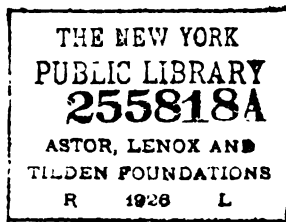
BY

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

AUTHOR OF "RICHARD FURLONG," "THE ANTAGONISTS,"
"THE OPEN WINDOW," ETC.



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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1914



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To
LOUISE JOPLING ROWE

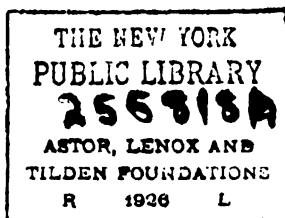
One may repay kindness, over and over again perhaps, but such sympathy and understanding as you have always shown to me is indeed difficult to requite. It can only be done by the offer of something intrinsically valueless, possessing merely to the one who gives, some intangible worth of sentiment, whereby you may know that the intention of his gratitude is sincere.

So here is the end of my Trilogy with your name in the front of it to show you and any others who may care to read, if it can, how deeply I am grateful for all your sympathy and the full measure of your understanding.

Yours always,

E. TEMPLE THURSTON.

"Gellibrands," 1914.



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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

IT was not until some years after the death of his wife, Constance, that Richard Furlong painted the second picture of that subject, the first of which had been called "The Mysterious Journey." Indeed, the meaning which he had seen in the death of Mrs. Collins' baby was no longer apparent to him in the death of his own wife. Because the despair was his, he could not see beyond the inevitable fact; was too prostrate in his mind with grief to find the abstract symbol in the concrete thing—as is ever the way with one who would be a philosopher.

Yet if of inner meanings he learnt no more, truly grief taught him much. With painful suddenness he came to find the superlative value, inseparably associating itself with what he had lost. He realized that that which lay dead and almost meaningless on their bed upstairs, had in life been a great and very noble woman. Circumstance of birth, conditions of education, these were but the setting in which he had found her, and to him, looking at life broadly, with all generosity of impulse, they had meant nothing, no



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more than the iron of some mediæval cross wherein a barbaric and priceless stone is set.

Walking the streets then for those three days, for he would not enter the house while they made preparations for the funeral, he came to the true understanding of her nobility, and thereby set an ideal of women in his mind which lasted him his lifetime.

Mr. Nibbs has told me of the heart-broken creature that he was; all his vitality benumbed, his head that he held high hanging loosely like that of a dog that has been whipped, and his lips, which in a joyous youthfulness of life were often parted, set tight together as though he determined that in silence he would bear the scourge of God.

From place to place he wandered where they had often been together, visiting even the gardens at Kew, seeking the very spot where first Constance had told him that she loved him, as though he would drive the iron of despair still deeper in his soul and wring out suffering to the last and bitter drop.

"On the day that she was going to be buried," Mr. Nibbs told me, "it was arranged for the afternoon so that the undertaker's men could 'ave their lunch before they started, and get up to Kensal Green and everythin' be over just about tea-time— I was cuttin' out a gold mount in the shop, on the counter, and I 'appened to look out through a gap in the pictures and things that was 'angin' up—you know what I mean, a little gap—and blowed if I didn't see 'im standin' outside there, looking in the winder at one of his pictures. I'd got 'em in the front.

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" 'Emily,' I says, 'there's Mr. Furlong.'

" 'Where?' says she.

" 'Outside the winder lookin' at one of 'is pictures.'

" 'Like 'im,' she says, 'to be thinkin' of 'is pictures the very day 'is wife's goin' to be buried.'

" 'It wasn't unkind she meant it. With one as keen as 'e was, it was like 'im.

" 'Ask 'im to come inside,' she says, and I looked out through the gap once more before I tapped on the winder, just sort of to see what 'e was thinkin' about, and there was tears just rollin' down 'is cheeks. 'E wasn't lookin' at the pictures no more than what I was.

" ' 'E'll come inside,' I says to Emily, 'if 'e wants to.' But a moment or so later I see 'im rub 'is knuckles in 'is eyes and just turn away as if 'e'd never known us in 'is life. I went to the door after a minute and looked out, and there 'e was, crossin' the street, as though 'e didn't care a damn what run 'im down."

This is but a slight picture of his sufferings. There must have been many more. For those three days he never spoke to anyone; not even to Mrs. Baldwin. Nor did he come to see what had become of the child. Indeed, she took it with her to the oil-shop, secured the services of a nurse, and, so far as can be imagined, steered its life through those first few trembling days when its existence was a gamble between life and death.

Only to one person did he speak before the funeral set forth from the insignificant doorway of that house



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in Great Queen Street. It was as he climbed the stairs while the hearse was at the door and the undertaker's men were waiting to carry the coffin downstairs. They were standing on the landing on Mrs. Beasley's floor while she was upstairs helping with the arrangements of an event which is always full of curious interest to the inmates of houses such as this. They were talking under their breath as becomes their doleful trade, but a story was being told that called for smothered laughter and a holding of sides. As Dicky turned the corner of the stairs and came towards them, their merriment was cut short, and, like automatons, they assumed the grief of commerce with drooping eyes and sanctimonious looks.

Dicky stood still, gazing long at them, and then with fierce contempt he spoke, the first words he had said for three long days.

"You bloody fools!" said he, "why don't you go on with your laughing. Do you think it does any good to us to see you with your faces pulled out long. What's your joke? What's your story? What are you laughing at?"

They tried to pacify him, but he forced them to his mood. In halting foolishness the teller of the story told his tale again, and grimly Dicky looked at him. When he had finished, one tittered and then was quiet.

"Yes—damned funny," said Dicky, and walked upstairs.

This was a new Dicky, and in three days. A bitterness had come to him he had never known before.

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Never once had he looked at Constance again since the day on which she died, and if there were any argument in his mind for such a course, it was a consciousness of the hollow meaning of philosophy.

"Death is only interesting when you die yourself," he thought, and in those days the desire to follow her, to escape his own loneliness, had often crossed his mind. It could have been his work alone that kept the purpose from completion. The struggle was in himself. For those three days not a soul had come near him. He had avoided everyone.

Upstairs in the little bedroom he found the coffin lying on the bed. On the top of it was a wreath of white flowers, and, by the side of the bed knelt Mrs. Baldwin, her red eyes shedding a continuous stream of tears, her lips babbling a dim and incoherent memory of the prayers she had been taught to say when a child.

Dicky stood for a moment watching her. When she became conscious of him there, she wiped her eyes on the bed-clothes, and with an effort sniffed into silence.

"Who put those flowers there?" he asked.

"I did, Dicky—she did like flowers so—always did from quite a little thing."

This was pure sentiment, which every Englishman feels bound in duty to detest. Dicky had never heard Constance speak of flowers. In that neighbourhood there are no flowers to speak about, for though the Covent Garden market is so near, it is too near for those who live in Drury Lane to visit

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it, unless it be their trade. Dicky felt excessively British as he listened to the whining of her voice.

"It's the first I've heard of her liking them," said he, "and if she did, that's the last way she'd care to see them treated. Why should you want to kill one thing before its time because another thing is dead?"

She looked up at him, bewildered. This was the first time he had been to the house, the first time he had spoken to her since Constance had died. For three days she knew he had been walking the streets. Where he had slept at night she had often wondered. Occasionally he had come back to the oil-shop, but never to Great Queen Street until now. And in that short time he had become a different man. She heard it in his voice; saw it in his face. No gentleness in Dicky could she find.

"What's 'appened to yer, Dicky?" she enquired.

His eyes went to the coffin on the bed and then turned full on her. That was answer enough. She wanted to take him in her arms, because he was the only thing left that made her feel a mother, but knew from those eyes of his that she was up against the whole British contempt of sentiment, and therefore refrained. The effort brought the tears into her eyes again. With a trembling lip she went to the door.

"Shall I tell 'em everythin's ready now?" she asked. He nodded his head, and, leaving the room quietly, she softly shut the door, saying to herself as she crept downstairs: "I'll leave 'im a moment or two with 'er—p'raps that'll soften 'im. Funny 'e

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was about them flowers. What if she never 'ad said she liked 'em, I won't 'ave no daughter of mine goin' to the cemetery without a touch o' somethin' on the 'earse." All of which she said aloud and somewhat defiantly, being out of Dicky's hearing.

But those moments alone with the body of Constance, hidden away in that highly polished thing on the bed, had no effect to soften him. The glittering brass fittings on the coffin which Mrs. Baldwin had so firmly stipulated for with the undertaker added to the ugliness of everything he saw. Had there been a sense of beauty with it all, bitterness might then indeed have broken down before the grand simplicity of death. But this confusion of ugliness only hardened his heart.

The cheap wreath of flowers, the imitated grain of the wood on the common deal board of the coffin, the light struggling to come in through the curtained windows, and that bed made up with a ridiculous care for appearances, all these things were ugliness for which his soul could find no forgiveness, and, staring at them for a little, he turned away.

This was the last time he would see that room. He closed the door with a dim understanding that he was turning away from the old life, and about to begin a new; just as when he had left the Mill at Eckington and set forth upon his journey up to London. Then the thought of Dorothy had been his impetus, and after her the love of Constance that had satisfied every demand of his nature. But now? What was there now? Nothing but his work itself,

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the ambition to create things as beautiful as the world had ever seen, the energy to pursue, to overcome, to capture. But where was the energy? In his spirit there was none. The woman whom he loved was dead, and all his energy was gone.

As he reached the undertaker's men, still standing on the landing, but now in decorous silence and respect, he stopped.

"You can bring the coffin down," said he, "there's nothing more to be done."

CHAPTER II

IN the carriage that followed the hearse Dicky sat in silence with Mr. and Mrs. Nibbs and Mrs. Baldwin. Occasionally they spoke a word or so, as when, alluding to the animal drawing the vehicle, Mrs. Baldwin regretted it was not pure black.

"The undertaker," said she, "told me that it wouldn't 'ave a long mane or a long tail, but it would be black, 'e said."

She peered out of the window and the black jet ornaments on upright wires in her bonnet quivered in the wind.

"I don't call that 'orse black," she declared; "'e said it 'ud take five shillin's off the bill, not to 'ave a long tail—but with that brown thing it ought to a' been ten."

"'Tain't a proper funeral 'orse at all," said Emily.

"Wish I 'adn't tried to save five shillin's," Mrs. Baldwin muttered with a trembling lip. The thought



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of it appearing to her then as ungenerous economy was bringing the tears to the verge of her eyes, partly for what Constance with her generous soul would have thought of her, partly because she felt sure that people must notice it in the street.

"Spoilin' the ship for a 'aporth of tar," remarked Mr. Nibbs, and believed that it was more apt than ridiculous.

Dicky looked at him with an insane desire to begin laughing, to go on laughing, and to laugh until his laughter had become a shout.

Only Emily had common sense and that sobered him.

"What's it matter," said she, "what colour the 'orse is so long as it gets to Kensal Green and she's buried decent—poor thing."

This persuaded them to silence again, and Dicky looked out of the window into the Harrow Road. He was longing to get it all over, yet resented the jogging trot which the conditions of traffic forced them to adopt. That had the sense of sacrilege to him; that now that she was dead, everybody combined to hasten her out of the world, to cover her with the dust to which she must inevitably return.

Then he began to think of her, how gentle she had been, how fierce she was at times in his defence. How could ever there be another woman like her in the world? Out of the greatness of His mind God had made her. He put it to himself that way, because it conveyed a greater sense of nobility to his ideas, but by now he had ceased to believe in God.

This phase had come late with him, and bitter-



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ness of mind had brought it. It was more in order to defeat the ways of God that he denied Him, for in those days, the bitterness in his soul was the bitterness of resentment. He resented the men in the street who raised their hats as the hearse passed by. Why could they not leave him and his sorrow to himself, instead of making a show of respect, uncovering their heads to parade a sentiment about death? He needed to be left alone in this despair of his yet everyone seemed to combine to bear him company—the men in the street, Mrs. Baldwin, Emily and Mr. Nibbs.

He longed for it all to be over that he might get away. Only the women passing by on the pavements took no notice of the hearse. Whilst men were assuming a grave expression on their faces and solemnly raising their hats, women pursued their business of the day, laughing and chatting as though death in the midst of life were nothing to them. He set to wondering why that was, and all this was the spirit of egotism, inseparable from his temperament. He lived in himself, and yet, true to the artist that he was, he feared to live alone.

And now that the woman he had lived with in himself was dead, the mind of Dicky had become as helpless as a child, prone to unwarrantable resentment, eager to take offence, unsteadied by despair. With the brilliant success he had just achieved, he still could see no prospects of his work before him. Indeed, robbed suddenly of the woman he loved, the meaning of that work seemed gone. She had not

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understood it when she was alive, but now that Constance was dead, he was reaping the knowledge of all that she had meant to his vitality.

"God!" he muttered to himself as he looked out of the window, and Mr. Nibbs and Emily and Mrs. Baldwin all gazed at him suddenly, suddenly conscious that that quiet figure who, from his very silence they had almost believed was silent in his mind, was suffering greater agony of thoughts than they who could talk of the economy of funerals.

"Poor boy," whispered Mrs. Baldwin in Emily's ear; "I suppose 'e feels it more than what I do, though she was my only child. Oh dear—oh dear—it's a 'ard world when you 'ave to part with them you love best. Now you'd 'ave thought I'd miss my 'usband more than 'er—but I didn't. 'It will be a rest,' 'e says before 'e dies. Those were 'is last words. 'It will be a rest,' 'e said. Well, I never knew whether 'e meant it was a rest from me or what it was. But I will say this—I know Constance didn't want to go. What with 'er baby and everything—poor child."

Her whisperings had ceased by now. She spoke all this to the occupants of the carriage at large, and Mr. Nibbs listened with nodding head, conscious that any woman in distress must be allowed to talk, and that a nodding head, like royalty in a crowd, is best accompaniment to their woes.

"She was a good daughter to me, I will say that," Mrs. Baldwin continued, "and a good wife, too, I'm sure." Here her lip began to quiver as she spoke,



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for by those infinite degrees, which are the only joy of grief, she was working herself into that state of melancholy without which no sorrow can fully be appreciated.

"Try and not think about it," urged Emily, who knew too well the paroxysms likely to ensue.

"'Ow can I 'elp it, my dear?" exclaimed Mrs. Baldwin. "Only three days, mind you. She's only been dead three days. Four days ago and she was talkin' quite lively to me while I sat beside 'er bed. I can't rightly believe it yet."

So she might have continued to the accompaniment of her own weeping and Mr. Nibbs' nodding head. But here it was Dicky turned, cutting in half the sentence she had just begun.

"Oh—for God's sake, leave her alone!" he begged. "She's dead, and not a word you say could make her better than she was."

Mrs. Baldwin fell into astonished silence, just sniffing and wiping her eyes in pity for herself at his rebuke. He turned back again to the window and then, glancing at Mr. Nibbs, she raised her eyes as one who expresses her bewilderment. She knew she would never understand Dicky as long as she lived, and accounted for it all because he was as she said—a gentleman.

So then in silence, their little procession continued on its way to Kensal Green, while every few minutes Mrs. Baldwin asked: "Are we still in the 'Arrer Road? Are we still in the 'Arrer Road?"

They came at last to a block in the traffic. The



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carriage stopped. The road was up in front of them, and people on the pavement looked, as those who would not look, into the window as they passed.

On the further side, where Dicky was sitting, an open carriage and pair pulled up in line with them. For some little while he sat looking at its occupants, thinking his own thoughts, half conscious that a man and woman were leaning back against the cushions, laughing and talking at their ease.

He was not aware that as she talked the woman's eyes dwelt sometimes on his face, dwelt with the interest of one to whom all life is interesting. Indeed, that deep expression of despair on Dicky's countenance had arrested her, and as the man laughed and talked beside her, so, she, too, laughed and talked, but thought and wondered at the pain she saw there stamped on Dicky's face. It was only as her glance strayed further, as she was made aware of the hearse beyond, that the full meaning of it came to her, when evidently she must have said to her companion—"Look at the face of that boy in the carriage"—for both at that moment gazed at him and Dicky became conscious of her eyes.

He looked full into her face, saying in his mind—What right have you to look at me if you know what I feel? And accepting the reproof of that look, she glanced away, but Dicky still gazed at her. It was a face to draw. He found his mind using a pencil on a clean white sheet, and the lines came easily, attractingly, forcefully. There was more character than pure beauty. The line of the jaw from

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the chin to the ear was not only a beautiful line, it was a bold one, full of meaning. And the eyes were big and the mouth was big. It was character he found on that clean white sheet of paper.

A moment later he found her looking at him again, when, feeling that he knew her better, he tried to return her glance, but could not. For that one moment, this stranger in the crowd had made him forget his Constance. With a fierce bound his heart came back to her, and it was like one waking from a troubled sleep to remember that the misery of the yesterday is still the misery of to-day.

"Lord! Will they never move on!" he muttered, and as though in answer to his appeal, the carriage jolted as they continued down the Harrow Road on their way to Kensal Green.

CHAPTER III

AS the coffin was lowered into the grave, Mrs. Baldwin broke into a fresh flood of tears; Emily snatched quickly for her handkerchief, only realising and abusing herself, when it was too late, for not having brought one not absolutely clean. Even Mr. Nibbs, who held that however soft a man's heart might be, he should never show his grief in public, found himself swallowing hastily the uncomfortable sensation which had forced itself into his throat.

Only Dicky was dry-eyed in that unhappy little

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gathering standing beside the fresh dug earth in the cemetery of Kensal Green. The gravediggers and the clergymen, they were all too used to that sort of thing to notice one way or another how each one bore their grief.

"Dust to dust—ashes to ashes," intoned the clergyman, and, hearing a clock strike four, knew that in five minutes a train would arrive at Paddington bringing his wife and two children from Reading, where they had been staying for a week. It was more than a week, he thought. That day made the eighth.

Dicky stared down into that pit in the ground where the coffin lay. He looked for the last time at that imitation grain on the highly varnished deal—deal that pretended to be oak. He gazed as though fascinated by the glittering brass furniture, thinking—and without any remembrance that he had thought it all before at his mother's funeral—how soon that brass would grow green beneath the sodden earth; how soon the sham grain of that deal would be gone, how swiftly it would admit the lie and show that it was not oak.

But now his mind carried further in a gruesome liveliness of his own imagination. He saw the face of the woman whom he loved spoilt and disfigured by that pitiless alchemy of the earth. And once having fastened upon that idea, his mind leapt with vivid imagination to the making of pictures more horrible than he could bear to see. With a tense effort he held himself in check, clenching his hands, setting his teeth, until the last word of the service



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had been spoken. Then, as the clergyman walked away, he came quickly to Mrs. Baldwin's side.

"Look after the child," he said. "I'll send you money and you'll hear from me—I'm going away."

Bewilderment stopped her tears.

"Goin' where, Dicky?" she asked.

"I don't know quite—you'll hear from me."

He shook hands with Emily. He shook hands with Mr. Nibbs. There was that look in his eyes which silenced any words that might have been on their lips. They made no offer to prevent him, asked no further questions, and away he walked, down the gravel path to the main gate of the cemetery, his head bent to the ground, his hands deep in his pockets, his shoulders round by grief. In silence they watched him till the last moment, and when he had turned out of sight, then one and all they twisted round and gazed at one another.

"If that boy came to any 'arm," said Mr. Nibbs, "I should never forgive meself."

"Well—why d'yer let 'im go?" asked Emily.

"There ain't no stoppin' Dicky," declared Mrs. Baldwin; "I know 'im when 'is mouth gets like that. I remember when 'e was tryin' to make 'is printin' machine out of that washin' mangle. 'I don't know what a printin' machine is,' I said to 'im; 'but if you think you're goin' to make pictures out of a thin' like what I keeps in the scullery for wringin' water out, you've made a mistake,' I said; 'it's no more to be done,' I said, 'than if I was to make a reckonin'



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machine out of a barrel of butter.' But 'e just looked at me, with 'is mouth like it was just now, and 'e said, 'Ow d'yer think Constance is goin' to make 'er baby?' And when I looks at 'im, 'e went on and said, 'With a little pain,' he said, 'and a little patience, but mainly,' 'e says, 'because she's got to.' Which was all Greek to me except that I saw 'e didn't know what 'e was talkin' about. A little pain! And the way that poor child suffered!"

And this, bringing Mrs. Baldwin back to the painful subject that was uppermost in her mind, she talked of nothing else but Constance all the way back from the cemetery, now weeping, sometimes even smiling at the stories she recounted.

Constance had been a queer child. Wayward was the word that Mr. Nibbs supplied her with in one of her pauses, and to that word she clung, using it on every possible occasion.

They sat together in the little parlour over the oil-shop, that same room where Dicky had had his first meal with Constance and Mrs. Baldwin, and there, over cups of tea, they talked of her who was dead and of him who remained, draining the cup of Mrs. Baldwin's sorrow till the dregs of it were dry. Then suddenly, out of the midst of a silence, came the arresting cry of a child that struck into the hearts of the women and brought to Mr. Nibbs an appreciation of his own insignificance.

Mrs. Baldwin jumped to her feet.

"If it wasn't for that child," said she, "I don't think I could face it—I don't really. It's—" An-



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other cry cut short her sentence. She waited to say no more. She was gone.

Mr. Nibbs took out his pocket handkerchief and wiped his hands.

"Come along, Emily," he said quietly, "back to work. The funeral's over."

CHAPTER IV.

DICKY took to the road, but with no definite intention in his mind until, after walking for two hours, he learnt that he was on the way to Hounslow. With a vague remembrance that that town was a junction of two of the main roads leading into the heart of England, he pursued his path, ignoring the countless trams that passed him by, almost unconscious of their existence as they rocked along the road, to and fro, backwards and forwards on their unceasing journeys.

At Hounslow, which he reached soon after eight o'clock, he walked into the bar of a shabby-looking hotel and enquired the price of a room for the night.

"Three and six with breakfast," the barmaid informed him, and when he had made a swift calculation of the odd shillings beside the sovereign that lay in his pocket, he nodded his head.

"Then I want a room," said he.

With a certain amount of promptness she blew down a speaking-tube, and, with no different tone in

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her voice, said into the mouth of it: "There's a young gentleman wants a room for to-night." Whereupon a voice, no further away than on the other side of a thin partition, was heard to reply: "All right. I'll tell Lizzie to get number five ready."

At this, the barmaid put the whistle back into the speaking-tube and, turning to Dicky, said: "Your room'll be number five."

"So I heard," said he, at which she laughed, leant across the counter of the bar, and, lowering her voice, whispered: "'Tis silly—ain't it? Everyone can 'ear. But the boss thinks it looks more important to 'ave a speakin'-tube."

Dicky sat down on a stool beside the counter. He had been walking for four hours, and suddenly became conscious that he was tired. Even the barmaid noticed and remarked upon it.

"Yes—I suppose I am tired," said Dicky.

"Tirin' day," said she. "I've felt it like that myself. Muggy—yer know—don't agree with me. You workin' 'ere?"

Dicky shook his head.

"Uxbridge?"

"No."

"Where 'ave you come from then?"

"London."

"Oh—those trams—I know—ain't they awful? Tire me to death they would, all that way. A motor car's what I like. I've been into London once or twice on a car. That's what I call makin' a rest of travellin', that is."



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Dicky supposed it was.

"Ain't yer never been in a car?" she asked.

He shook his head and found himself half amused by the tone of unoffensive superiority in her voice when she said, "Really?" raising her eyebrows and then sweeping the slops off the counter into the sawdust on the floor of the bar.

For a moment he felt inclined to tell her that he had walked from London, wondering what she would say to that. Then, fearing only the explanations it might lead to, he merely asked for some bread and cheese. She brought it to him, sitting there on the other side of the counter, talking to him as he ate it and drank his glass of beer.

Two or three times in a pause of her conversation the thought of all that had happened that day came rushing in a confusion to his mind. Then he would stop eating, stare in front of him, and sigh so deeply, so painfully, that the barmaid turned at the sound to look at him. When he had done it a third time, she leant across the counter.

"What's the matter with *you?*" she enquired.

He asked what she meant.

"Well—the way you're sighing and goin' on, one 'ud think it was your last day on earth."

He tried to smile, and—"It might be," said he.

She shuddered. "For God's sake don't talk like that," she exclaimed. "That ain't the way to be cheerful. What's happened to yer?"

Dicky set his teeth and looked at her, when she saw for the first time that his eyes were hollow for

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the want of sleep, whilst he, for the first time, saw that she was handsome, as men might speak of her, with good eyes, but cheeks and lips that were rouged and powdered, with eyebrows and lashes that were deftly blackened.

"Nothing's happened," said he, fearing the sympathy she would offer were he to tell her what it was. "I'm tired—that's all."

"You look more than tired," she replied, and all that evening as he sat in the bar in a far corner listening to the conversations of the men who dropped in for a drink, she watched him with quick glances of her eyes.

There was in her mind the conviction that something was wrong with him. Indeed, when she saw his head nodding on his chest, she came round from behind the counter to his side.

"'Adn't you better go up to your room," said she, "and get a good night's rest—you want it yer know. Number five's your room."

He looked at her gratefully, then nodded his head. Nobody turned round to look at him. Only the barmaid followed him with her eyes till he was gone, and for the rest of that evening was preoccupied to her friends. Dicky had said it might be his last day on earth. She was prone to terrors. Her mind had seized upon that.

"He's the sort of feller," she kept saying to herself, "as you might find dead in his bed to-morrow."

Perhaps it was this thought still possessing her as she went up to her room that night, for, as she



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was about to pass the door of number five, she stopped to listen.

For the first moment or so there was nothing but silence, yet a silence that had its sound of dread to her. She thought of herself being asked at the inquest if she had noticed anything unusual about the gentleman in number five the night before, and could hear herself saying how he had remarked that that might be his last day on earth. A hunger for the horrors of the halfpenny Press and a lively imagination brought her to this. Wherefore she listened the longer to the suggestive silence. But when she heard Dicky move in the bed a sigh of relief escaped her. She was about to turn away; then stopped.

The sound of his voice came to her from inside the room. Curiosity, apprehension, a thousand instincts prompted her to bend down nearer to the door and listen. The first words were lost to her, and then the exclamation—"Oh—my God!" reached her ears. With that same feeling of apprehension knocking in her heart, she still listened. A sound like a smothered cough followed this, and then another quickly repeated, and again and again, until she realised what it was—a thing she had never heard in her life before—the sound of a man sobbing, such a sound as no woman can hear and be unmoved. It is to her the sound of a dumb animal in distress.

"Oh, dear me!" she said to herself, "what can I do?" and knew there was nothing that could be done; that her sex and her age, her rouged cheeks and her

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blackened eyebrows, were all an impediment to the sympathy she would like to offer him.

"What would 'e think," she muttered to herself, "if I was to go in and ask if there was anythin' I could do for 'im?" Whereupon, searching her knowledge of men, she came to the conclusion that he would be bound to misunderstand her intentions. It did not occur to her that possibly she had misunderstood them herself; that in this desire to offer sympathy lay some subtle attraction to Dicky, too immature and unformed for her to be aware of its existence. Wherefore modesty played the better part in her, when believing that he was only crying in a healthy distress of mind, she walked slowly and quietly on to her room in a further part of the house, lying long awake and wondering what had befallen him.

In the morning at nine o'clock, when she came downstairs, she heard that the gentleman in number five had had his breakfast, paid his bill, and gone. This was one of those chance encounters in life which clung to her memory, and from year to year recurred whenever the thought of it was suggested to her mind.

Meanwhile Dicky was on his way down to the Portsmouth Road to the Fox Inn at Eversley. There he stayed that night, sleeping in the very bed which they had occupied when Constance and he had had to sing the countryside to pay for their bed and supper.

"Where's your wife this time?" the landlady had asked suspiciously.



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"She's dead," said Dicky simply, and, judging the look in his eyes, the woman forgot the worldliness of her suspicions and believed him.

"Poor boy," she said.

She put a whisky bottle full of hot water in his bed that night, and herself turned down the sheets.

CHAPTER V

ALL this I have written for the enlightenment of those who have said that Dicky Furlong was but little concerned by the death of Constance, his wife. Indeed, it seems that the more public the name of a man becomes, the less is he understood; that the more they know, the less all people comprehend.

But those who say that he recovered too swiftly from the loss of her, neither take his age into account, nor have observed the recuperative power of youth. Therefore it is my earnest desire to show how for those first few weeks of his bereavement Dicky was stricken so low that his work meant nothing to him; that all vitality, initiative and ambition, lay silent and powerless in his soul. For all these had the love of Constance meant to Dicky Furlong.

Mrs. Bennett, the landlord's wife of the Fox Inn, awoke him next morning as he lay, sleeping heavily in exhaustion from the first wakeful hours of the night and his long walk the day before.

Putting his jug of hot water down on the dressing-

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table, she stood for a moment wondering whether it were not kinder to let him sleep on, knowing dimly what it must be to wake to another day finding the terror is not a dream.

A mid-October sun was falling on to the bed, cutting squares of pale gold on the cheap white counterpane. Leaves from the elm tree had blown through the open window on to the dressing-table. Some had fluttered to the floor. She looked at that open window through which a chill autumnal air was passing, and wondered to herself how these people from London could sleep under such conditions. Then, just as she had made up her mind to go away, Dicky turned in the bed and coughed.

"Well—I'm not surprised," said she.

He sat up—blinking his eyes, his hair hanging wildly over his forehead.

"What?" he replied.

"Not surprised at you coughin' with that window wide open all night. You'll catch your death of cold one of these days."

"I haven't got a cold," said Dicky, then looked about him, at the sloping ceiling, the dressing-table decked in white muslin over some cheaper pink material, the uncrumpled pillow beside him in the double bed, all with a growing understanding of where he was. When all the memories accompanying his closer vision followed fast on this and he beheld the terror in his mind could be no dream, he looked out of the open window to the tops of the elm trees splashed in gold with their autumn leaves, and



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drew a breath so deeply that Mrs. Bennett sighed as well.

Yet she was no person for giving words to sympathy. Five children to bring up and a husband who liked his beer, had left but little gentleness in her. Her sigh was the complete expression of all that was in her mind. She had no inclination to say what she felt.

"'Ow did you get 'ere last evening?" she asked. "Walk' from Blackwater? If I 'adn't 'ave known 'oo you was, I wouldn't 'ave taken you in with no luggage. I've 'ad those sort of visitors before."

"I walked from Hounslow," said Dicky.

"From 'Ounslow!" She took it upon herself to shut the window. "Why, that's near London, ain't it?"

"Yes—about sixteen miles out."

"Do you mean to say you walked twenty miles yesterday?"

"Yes—something like that."

"What for? 'Aven't you got any money?" With every excuse, she was thinking of her bill, of the difficulties Constance and he had had before to pay it.

"No—I've got enough money," said he. "I wanted to walk. I had to go somewhere."

"Well—why did yer come 'ere? Only distressin' yerself, ain't yer, sleeping in that same bed without 'er by the side of yer?"

"Yes—I suppose I am," said he; "still I expect I want to distress myself—I don't know."

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"Well—that's a silly thing to do," she ejaculated. "What do yer want to go and do that for?"

"I don't know," he replied.

And he did not know, yet the reason doubtless is clear enough. To the very inner meaning of himself, Dicky was that which, for a better name, we call an artist. The instinct to create was conscious and compelling in him, and while the instinct to suffer was unconscious, it was compelling, too. To create but one thing a man must know somewhat of all things, wherefore the artist woos the experience of emotion as ardently as he woos a mate. Love, passion, lust and suffering, all these and a thousand others unconsciously attract him as the web of a spider calls a fly. To touch emotion, at whatever cost, is as instinctive in him as the will to breathe. He plays with fire all his life, conscious no doubt, of the good to be achieved, yet burning his fingers, risking his soul in the furnace, since that fire alone is the element with which he works, the power that melts all metal for his shaping.

Something of this it was that had driven Dicky to the Fox Inn at Eversley; but Mrs. Bennett, standing by his bedside then, might be supposed to have no sight of it. She argued in herself that no doubt he was suffering, but that it could not be so deep if he had come there while his sorrow was still fresh in his mind.

"'Adn't you better get up," she suggested presently. "I've brought yer shavin' water—it's 'ere on the dressin'-table. Then when you're ready to come



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down, just give a call over the bannisters and I'll get yer breakfast ready for yer."

He sat at his meal in the small parlour of the Fox, with the door that led into the corner of the garden wide open. The October sun was still shining. It found its way through the lace curtains and winked in points of light at him from the polished surface of the old brown earthenware teapot. Mrs. Bennett had put all her sympathy into the cooking of the bacon and eggs that lay untouched on the plate before him. It was in ways such as these that the good woman expressed the sympathy she felt. She could say nothing. But in a matter of bacon and eggs she could cook them well or badly, according to the state of her mind for the person who was to eat them.

He nibbled at the toast over which she had taken so much care, thinking all the time of the first morning that Constance and he had had their breakfast in that room; remembering, though at first they had thought it was a shabby sort of inn, yet, after a long silence, how Constance had looked up and said:

"I like the Fox."

And knowing then how it had meant no more than that she loved life, loved the day, loved the sun that had been pouring in through the same curtained window, he remembered how he had laughed at her simplicity.

With these recollections passing and repassing through his mind, he suffered all the pain his loss made possible, unconsciously learning, unconsciously

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understanding the more through every phase of it. Making at last an effort to struggle against the impossibility of that which seemed to lie before him, he rose to his feet, went in search of Mrs. Bennett, paid his bill, and set off once more.

Now his intention was to go straight to the Mill at Bredon, knowing, in those times, his father would give him welcome, and that there, away from all associations of Constance, he might bring back his mind into quieter channels where the possibility of work could return again.

It was three days later, dragging his feet wearily one after the other, that he came down the road from Little Cumberton, when the Mill and all the familiar reaches of the Avon stood in view.

Then it seemed, more than ever, that he felt alone. For the past was gone forever, and in the present there was none but himself. Yet the beauty of that winding bend of silver, interlacing the banks and the willows, like a silver thread stitched in and out through a glorious raiment, slowly took hold of his heart, and spurred his sense of beauty. There was still his work. He was not completely alone.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the door of the Mill house was opened to his knocking, and Dicky saw a young woman of about twenty-eight, whose face was strange to him, he realised more than ever that



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the past was gone. This, no doubt, was the housekeeper of whom he had heard, and his sister Anne was no longer mistress of the Mill. The whole order of things was new. He saw, even as he looked beyond her into the hall, how the furniture had been changed, and the aspect of everything was different.

"Is Mr. Furlong in?" he asked.

"Mr. Furlong's in the Mill," said she, and in her voice Dicky detected a tone of authority, a note of power at which instinctively the blood in him warmed. He felt the sudden heat of it in his cheeks.

"I'm Mr. Furlong's son," he said. "I suppose I can come in."

At once her eyes narrowed as she regarded him with a new interest.

"You're Dicky, then," said she, and stood aside to let him enter.

For some reason for which he could not account he resented that use of his name, but hid his resentment from her as he passed into the hall.

"I'll go and tell him you're here," said she, and closed the door behind them.

"Can't I go?" he asked. "I know my way about."

"Yes, of course," she replied, knowing from that moment there was a sword of antagonism drawn between them. Yet she smiled as she looked after his retreating figure, a smile that was not all confidence, not all amusement, not all displeasure; a smile, inscrutable to a man, but which any woman, had she seen it, would have understood.



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In the grinding room, where the unceasing thunder of the mill wheel was at its loudest, with his old brown coat now white with the dust of flour, Dicky found his father. Because of the noise of that wheel, it was impossible to hear anyone approach, and not until Dicky had laid his hand on his arm did the miller turn round.

In the shock of amazement which for the bare instant made him tremble, Dicky realised that his father was a little older, and a feeling of affection, of which, until that moment, he had hardly been aware, took hold upon him, tightening the grip of his hand.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Furlong, "whatever brings you here? Don't think I'm not delighted to see you, but why have you come?"

It must all return again in that moment, the agony of mind, the sense of terror, the sense of loneliness. The whole expression of his face changed to that set-lipped defiance of the scourge of God as he answered that Constance was dead.

Mr. Furlong's face grew for the moment older still as he heard the news. Inevitably he thought how near death was, even to the young. But that thought passed at once. The tears rushed into his ready eyes at the knowledge of Dicky's sorrow. It was like the father and like the son that the one should weep and the other keep dry eyes when anyone might see. Dicky turned away to the window of the grinding loft, looking down on to the water of the Avon that rushed with its ceaseless foam through the old



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wheel. He knew it was out of the deepest sympathy of his father's heart, yet, in his own egotism, hated to see those tears for the embarrassment they brought him. It had been the same egotism which had forced him as a boy to shun the habit of kissing his father when he said good-night; it was the same sentiment in Mr. Furlong which had found offence at it.

"When did this happen, old boy?" the miller asked presently, when he could trust his voice.

"About five days ago. I came straight on here after the funeral was over."

"Straight on here?"

He could not reconcile the five days with that statement.

"Yes," said Dicky, "I walked."

"All the way from London?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you tired?"

"Yes—I suppose I am."

Mr. Furlong took his son's arm, leading him away out of the grinding loft into the house.

"How was it she died?" he asked.

"A child," said Dicky simply.

"Oh dear—oh dear—" and that was all Mr. Furlong could say. For a while they sat in silence in the dining-room, where Dicky realised that here everything was changed as well. A new paper covered the walls. He recognised the fact that it was an improvement; yet again, was aware of a sense of resentment that the old wall-paper had been taken away. From its old position at the end of the table

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his mother's chair had been moved, and now stood in the window. Even a photograph of his mother, a photograph he had always hated because he knew her to be a thousand times more beautiful than ever that picture allowed, a photograph in the period of ridiculous bustles and tight sleeves—even that had been taken away. In vain his eyes wandered round the room to find it.

Then he looked across at his father.

"You've made a lot of changes here," said he, and from the way in which Mr. Furlong said—"Yes—I think it's an improvement—don't you?" and looked all around the room rather than meet his son's eyes, Dicky knew there had been more than the bare idea to add to his own comfort. When the miller asked him if he had yet seen Mrs. Flint, Dicky's mind leapt to an understanding of that association of ideas.

"Is that the housekeeper?" he asked with all ingenuousness.

"Yes—she looks after the house for me now," said Mr. Furlong, "now that Anne's gone. I think you'll like her. She's a good woman, Dicky."

It was just that attribute—good—which made Dicky realise in how high a regard his father held her. Mr. Furlong liked good women, yet it was a matter of doubt in Dicky's mind whether he knew a good woman when he saw one. From all he had heard and the letters she had written him, he had liked Bertha Geddes, and, with the years behind him now, Dicky could see how right the instinct of Christina, his mother, had been. He knew by this time



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where to place Bertha Geddes in a world of women. One swift thought of her then brought a shudder to his mind. And when he heard his father say that Mrs. Flint was a good woman, a wave of doubt passed in his thoughts at once.

"How did you hear of her?" he asked.

"I advertised, Dicky, in one of our local papers. She was one of those who answered. She came from a place called Fladbury—near Evesham, you know. Quite a little village. I liked the letter she wrote, and I went over to Evesham to see her. Of course she's quite young—I don't think she's thirty yet. But she's had a great unhappiness. Her husband died five months after they were married, leaving her almost penniless. Fortunately she had no children."

At the thought of death and the remembrance of how near Dicky was still to his bereavement, the tears rose into the poor man's eyes again and, leaning forward, he laid his hand on Dicky's arm.

"Poor old boy," said he.

"There's no good worrying about me," replied Dicky unemotionally. "I've got to pull through somehow or other, and work's the only thing that'll do it for me. I've got to work like ——." He just checked himself before the word—hell—looking away out of the window and muttering it for satisfaction below his breath.

Mr. Furlong tightened the hand that lay on his son's arm.

"There's our Father in Heaven, old boy," said he

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thickly; "you pray to Him—He'll give you a lift over the stile."

This was genuine faith, so present in Mr. Furlong's mind as to admit of that pleasant little colloquialism. But to Dicky, still racked with his own suffering, the uselessness of that advice sounded almost like blasphemy.

"There's not a bit of good," said he honestly, "in talking like that to me. You're right in your way, but it's not mine. When you talk about prayer like that, what you really mean is concentrating your mind on something. For you it's Our Father which art in Heaven. But concentrating on that's not going to do me any good. It may sound conceited, but I've got to lean on someone else. I've got to lean on myself, concentrate on myself—concentrate on my work. It's better to me to do something in one's work worth doing than to say a thousand prayers or go a million times to Communion. Religion is for the minds and souls of people who don't work with their minds or their souls, who have nothing else but prayer to exercise them."

He turned round from the window, when, finding a look of genuine suffering on his father's face, he tried at once to make amends.

"I'm sorry to have to say this, father," said he; "but if I'm going to stay here for a little while, as I hope you'll let me, it's no good our misunderstanding each other on this subject, which I know is a very dear one to you, and really I suppose is just as serious to me. I expect it hurts you to think that you



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brought me up in your particular faith, and then to hear me expressing opinions like this. But they're just as true and as real to me as yours are to you. So long as I strive honestly for my own good, that ought to be good enough for you as my father."

Mr. Furlong cleared the dryness of his throat. He moistened his lips.

"But do you think you know," said he, "what is your own good?"

"If I don't," said Dicky, "who does?"

"God," replied Mr. Furlong triumphantly.

"Then if only God knows," said Dicky at once, "how is it good in me if I do it? I don't want to find the goodness of God—let's say that's everywhere. I want to find the best in myself."

Finding no answer to this, though he sought it swiftly in a painful confusion of mind, Mr. Furlong said simply, "Dicky—how terribly you've changed."

CHAPTER VII

FOR some few months there followed a period in Dicky's career of which not many are aware, associating his work, as most of them do, with the many years he lived in London. Yet those few months at the Mill, when he was fighting against the depression of despair, struggling to find the best, as he put it to his father, in himself and his work, were productive of the foundation of those paintings



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which now we call his masterpieces, the few pictures he made in the last two years of his life.

Having been given free leave to make what he liked of his bedroom—the same which he had occupied when a boy, from the same window of which he had climbed out that morning to return but an hour later at death's door in the old shepherd's arms—he converted it into a studio, making by himself the top light which, if the house yet stands, you will still find set within the roof.

It was when waking one morning early, soon after his arrival at the Mill, that he lay in bed watching the warm light of the October sun slowly diffusing itself over the countryside, slowly illuminating the grey mists that were spread above the meadows, and then, knowing that sleep was no longer possible, remembering, too, perhaps those mornings in his youth when to rise at daybreak was almost the custom of the day, he threw the clothes from off him and jumped out of bed.

Everywhere that he walked the grass was wet and white with dew. Like silver melting in a crucible, the river mists dissolved and dispersed in the heat of the rising sun. On all the hedgerows a magic network of spiders' webs were strung; there were some like parachutes, some like crinolines, some like fine pendants hung about a woman's neck. But all of them studded with diamond drops of water which glistened and flashed prismatic colours in that early morning sun.

After those many years in London, in the grey



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neighbourhood of Drury Lane, this world of many wonders was to Dicky as the valley of precious stones to the wanderer Sindbad. Almost then did he forget his loss of Constance, whilst out of the joy of all he saw grew that inevitable desire to hold these beauties, and through the medium of his work to make them last when no sun could destroy them.

And so from that morning onwards he rose early every day, asking Mrs. Flint to call him with undeviating regularity that not an hour might be lost. He has told me himself that those early mornings in the country, when all his brain was clear and his eyes fresh to see, added more to the understanding of all that he might do, than any other time in his life.

Having made arrangements with Mr. Nibbs to keep his printing press for him, he set to work then in his little bedroom studio in the Mill to make his study for the first coloured wood-engraving to be sold to the order of Rheinhardt and Guernani, the dealers in Bond Street who had purchased his print of the interior of old Sardinia Street Chapel.

It was this first engraving, inspired by that knowledge that its sale was assured, influenced, too, I know, by the dread shadow of that sorrow which followed him wherever he went, which seems to me, almost without comparison, to be the finest of all that he ever did.

I have said from time to time through these pages that this is a history of the man himself, rather than of his work; that only now and again could I speak of the engravings and the pictures with which I am

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personally acquainted. This certainly then—as he called it, “The Mushroom Gatherers”—is one that I must describe.

The idea of it, I know, was got from one of those early morning walks of his and, simple as it may sound, it has all the grandeur of great beauty, whilst the note of it is that sad but noble poverty, such as I can only describe by a comparison to Millet’s “Gleaners.” Indeed, to those who have not seen it, the subject may suggest much the same type of effect, yet no two pictures could be less alike.

Through the grey mists hanging everywhere, he had caught that transparent suggestion of the green grass of the meadow below; has even, without actually indicating the clusters of white, convinced you that there in the dark green fairy rings of grass the mushrooms are forcing their velvet heads through the coarse grass stems. Had it no title, that picture, you would say as you looked at it: “This is a place to find mushrooms.” For there is even that damp earthy smell in the delicate atmosphere he has created. You can hear the dew water dripping, always dripping from the trees. You can believe you see the sodden shoes on the feet of those two shabby women and that crouching man as he stoops to pick a mushroom out of the mist. And with that crouching attitude of his, you catch the feeling of eagerness and triumph in the man as opposed to the lethargy of the women who are looking but cannot find.

Without hesitation this must be considered the



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high-water mark of his engraving work, for though he treated finer subjects, subjects more suitable to the limitations of that medium, I know of none in which he has created such delicacy of atmosphere or shown such power of restraint.

For as well may be supposed, these were critical moments in Dicky Furlong's life. So early after the loss of Constance the bitterness of resentment might have corroded all the finer sense of his ambition. It would do that, or it would enrich it. With no man could it have left his spirit as it was. But Dicky's character was such that he won the loss of her to his own account. In the depth of that despair, he laid a sure foundation of suffering for the greatness of his work; and the first person to realise this, ignorant of art, knowing nothing of the value of what he did, was Mrs. Flint.

It is my duty as biographer to reconstruct the characters of all those people coming in contact with Dicky Furlong from what material, small or great, is to my hand. Now apart from the few incidents told me by Dicky himself, the things at which he hinted, conveying the things he left unsaid, I have but little to go upon. Yet the character of Mrs. Flint has become a very clear one to me.

She was a clever woman, quick as all clever women are in the intuition of her sex. Bitterness and disappointment had not crushed her spirit. There was the proof of character alone. The loss of her husband after five brief, happy months of married life had not reconciled her to an inconsolable grief. She was

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still young; had tasted enough of life to know that much had been denied her. She had had no children, yet was healthy enough in mind and body to desire them. Passion in her, so uselessly aroused, was still a fire hungry for its feeding.

She was a pleasing looking woman, too. Not pretty, never beautiful, but attractive to the eye that saw her often. Her figure was well made, her head set well upon her shoulders. The capability she displayed in managing that household at the Mill, determined and effective though it might be, was not such as destroyed the impression a man might receive of her humanity. There might ever be the moment when, under the stress of accumulating circumstances, she would succumb to her own emotions.

From a feeling of resentment, of which both she and he were conscious, Dicky's interest in her grew steadily towards appreciation. He had been quick to realise in this situation at the Mill that the heart of his father was turning to youth again under the influence of her companionship.

This it was first of all that found and struck a chord of bitterness in his heart. He could not reconcile himself to the thought of her in his mother's place, for a man is even truer to the memory of his mother than he is to his wife. Indeed, such faithfulness of the two is the easier. There are no passions or emotions to seduce him away.

These changes in the appearance of the house he knew were the work of Mrs. Flint. It was she who had caused Christina's chair to be removed; she who



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had taken away that ridiculous photograph over the mantelpiece, slowly but surely eliminating the memories of Christina from Mr. Furlong's thoughts. And in all this at first, Dicky saw the clever working of a calculating mind.

Silently at meals he would watch her restrained attentions to his father, attentions which subtly took the form of allowing him to attend to her, laying thereby the delicate foundations to an ultimate mastery which it plainly could be seen she intended to achieve.

Often he would smile to himself during those meals, at her thoughtfulness for him which combined to impress his father with her admirable qualities, at the same time that it spurred that youthfulness of his heart to a quicker beating.

It was one evening when they had finished their high tea, about a month after Dicky had returned to the Mill, that Mr. Furlong and he were sitting in the dining-room, while Mrs. Flint was engaged at her duties in some other part of the house.

During a long silence they sat and smoked. Dicky thinking, as he was always doing then, of the work that occupied all his thoughts, whilst his father, with hands folded on his lap, listened eagerly to the beating of his heart accompanying those considerations upon the expediency of marrying again, which though he told himself frequently would never have been the thoughts of a young man in love, yet recurred to him continually despite all his efforts to check them.

"Dicky," he said at last, but in a voice pitched

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carefully on so casual a note that only an ear finely attuned to the character of his voice could have caught the sound of eagerness, "how do you get on with Mrs. Flint?"

Dicky heard the hidden ring of eagerness, and looked into his father's eyes, when the good man, trying and failing to meet the glance of one he so little understood, turned a quick and knowledgeable attention to the fire, saying to justify himself as he did so, "All that a fire wants is a draught. It takes some people years to realise that. I noticed with a certain amount of respect for her that Mrs. Flint always stirs a fire from the bottom."

"She would," said Dicky, at which, forgetting his confusion, his father looked up quickly into his face.

"How do you mean—she would?" said he.

"Well—I think she's a very capable woman," replied Dicky. "I think she knows what she's about."

"Yes—yes—I believe she does," Mr. Furlong agreed quickly. "For so young a woman she is extremely capable."

"I thought you said she was twenty-eight."

"Well—I know—isn't that very young? The blossom of womanhood I call that." Dicky saw that the romance in his heart had touched him to poetry. "Not young to you, my dear boy, perhaps," he went on, pleasurably smiling at his thoughts, "but young—shall we say—to me."

"Yes—young perhaps to you," said Dicky.

He said it with no certain intention, yet immediate-



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ly could see the sudden chill it had brought to his father's blood.

"Well—I don't think I'm so old as all that," said the miller. "How old would you say I was now?" he asked.

"Sixty-one," said Dicky promptly.

A quick light of annoyance came into Mr. Furlong's eyes at the disclosure of a secret which he believed had been kept. The old tone of authority for the instant started back into his voice.

"How did you know that?" he inquired.

"Mother told me how old you were when you were forty-five."

"Your mother had no right to do that," said he, as though she were still alive and he must censure her; feeling almost in his heart that she, wherever she might be, must know in that moment how annoyed he was. For he was not sixty-one. His birthday was the following week, and no one could say till then that he was more than sixty.

It was from such little incidents as this that Dicky soon learnt the romantic tendencies of his father's mind. For the poor man was so consumed with a consciousness of his own age, the disparity between it and the twenty-eight years of Mrs. Flint, that at every turn he disclosed his half-formed intentions by the very means he took to conceal them. Indeed, the ostrich with his head buried in the sand was no less visible to the naked eye than were the awakenings of romance in Mr. Furlong's heart.

Such youth, moreover, did it bring to him—for of



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all folly there is none so forgivably foolish as that of a man in love—that there were times when Dicky felt as though they had changed places; that he were the father, regarding, almost with amusement, the lover's enthusiasms of his son.

Some understanding of this must have reached Mr. Furlong's mind, for as the weeks went by he grew more and more reserved, only removing the cloak of it when he found himself alone with Mrs. Flint. But this had no power to destroy Dicky's knowledge of the truth. His father was in love; was determined to marry again, and only a self-conscious fear of appearances was delaying him from declaring his intentions at once.

But what Mrs. Flint felt upon the matter, of that Dicky knew nothing. A certain atmosphere of inscrutability surrounded her which he could not penetrate. Indeed, it may partly have been this which made his father timid in his heart. There is something irrevocable in refusal to a man of his age, and doubtless there were many moments in those days when he feared to put his fortune to the test.

It was perhaps this sense of the unknown in her which first awakened Dicky's interest in Mrs. Flint. There came to be a time when, having accustomed himself to those early hours of the morning, he would be awake conscious of a feeling of anticipation of that moment when she would knock on his door and enter with the jug of hot water for his shaving. There was, indeed, a servant in the house, a young girl, brought from the village of Eckington, under-



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going training' at the firm hands of Mrs. Flint. But in the first instance Dicky had asked her to call him, and from that day the housekeeper had chosen always to do it herself.

Over and over again, when she stood talking for a moment or two at the foot of his bed, he felt inclined to turn the subject of their conversation to the loneliness of his father in the Mill, but a look in her eyes, a note in her voice, had always dissuaded him from his intention. As his father feared a refusal from her lips, so Dicky was uncertain of the answer he might receive. The moment always passed leaving him with the words unspoken.

It may have been because these moments were very brief, moreover, the topic of Mrs. Flint's conversation was always that of Dicky's work. Surrounded everywhere by evidence of it in that studio bedroom, indeed, this is scarcely to be wondered at. He was at work on his wood-block of the "Mushroom Gatherers"; the five blocks of wood, representing the five colours which he used in the finished print, were all lying about the room. The equipment for the etchings he did whilst down in the country for those few months, copper-plates, needles, and every conceivable instrument for his labour, were in evidence everywhere. And all this was new matter of interest to her.

She had begun by calling artists—painters. But it was not long before she came to use the word—art, and what is more, with an intelligent appreciation of its meaning.



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"I'd always thought," she said to him one morning, "that painting was only copying; that anyone who had learnt and had enough patience could do it. I'd never thought it really meant anything when it was done."

It was from that moment he had begun to teach her something of what he knew; all of what he felt, and she, while but dimly understanding this which was a foreign tongue to her, grew in knowledge of Dicky himself and his ambitions.

"If one man can put the fear of God into another," he said one morning in the midst of expressive gesticulation, "surely I can put the meaning of God into what I do. Nothing exists without a meaning, and you're limiting yourself to bare luxury when you say that beauty is the only meaning in art. I'm not going to paint for the walls of people's dining-rooms—at least I hope to God I'm not!"

She had watched him, sitting up in his bed, throwing his arms about as he said this, and, coming to the swift knowledge that Dicky was no ordinary man, she said suddenly——

"How unlike your father you are, Dicky!"

At that he had looked up quickly, realising that this was Mrs. Flint, that she was only twenty-eight, and that by then his father was sixty-one. For though nothing had been said about it, the day of the birthday had passed. His father was sixty-one and Mrs. Flint was still twenty-eight.

"Well—I suppose I am different," he had replied, and later, when he found his shaving water half-cold,



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realised how long she must have stood there talking to him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE subjects of Dicky's etchings when he was living at the Mill, while they make a complete collection in themselves, were yet only studies of Nature, quickening his observation for the work he was ultimately to do. They comprise a series of the most delicate and intimate drawings of all those thousand little things which, for the most part, we all take for granted in our appreciation of the beauties of the fields and hedgerows.

His work on the "Mushroom Gatherers" probably brought the first suggestion to his mind, for in the little collection of these etchings which he made, I find the first to be a study of two mushrooms alone on the broad page, one fully grown, the other just thrusting forth its round white head through the tangle of grass blades. Having done that, with a beautiful fineness of line and a delicate suggestion of colour, he began to see the possibilities in pursuing those studies further.

The twig of a birch tree, the berries of a briar, just faintly tinted with red, a spider's web strung to a blackthorn twig, all dripping with dew; the twisted root of violet and the withered seedpods of that summer's hemlock, all these and many others were the studies he made in beautiful lines of dry-point, tinted

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suggestively with faint colours which brought all the sense of completion to the fragile pictures that they were. Some thirty of these little etchings, ultimately collected in a portfolio, were sold for one hundred and twenty pounds two days after they had been handed over to Rheinhardt and Guernani, the dealers in Bond Street.

And it was in these that the interest of Mrs. Flint began to be awakened towards Dicky's work. Often asleep when first she entered his room in the morning, he would sometimes wake up to find her bent over the drawing-board where he had left his work the night before. On each of these occasions he had first stirred in the bed, drawing her attention to the fact that he was awake, when, quickly putting down his jug of hot water on the washhandstand, she had mentioned the time and left the room.

The last time that it occurred, his eyes opened before he moved, and, lying there motionless, he watched her. Turning silently at last from the drawing-board, she looked around at the bed, then, believing him still to be asleep, she bent down, taking one drawing after another from a portfolio on the floor, looking long at each one before she put it back again.

Over one she stayed longer than the rest, when curiosity becoming peremptory in him, he sat up in bed, asking her what it was. With a flush of colour burning suddenly in her cheeks, she thrust the paper back again quickly into the portfolio, but not so quickly as that he could fail to see what it was—a



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study of the nude he had done in charcoal at the schools in London.

"It was nothing," said she, by which he might have guessed the confusion of her mind, but the subject being so commonplace to him, he scarcely realised it. He took the flush in her cheeks to mean that same disapproval which he had met with in Mr. Leggatt. For the instant it stirred in him a feeling of contempt for such narrow-mindedness. In a spirit of perverseness he let her see that he knew what it was.

"I suppose you disapprove of that sort of work," said he.

She took the jug of hot water from the desk and put it on the washhandstand, wishing the floor might give way, and, taking her with it, hide from him the burning colour in her cheeks.

"No—I don't disapprove," she replied. "I—I knew that artists had to do that sort of thing when they were learning."

The tone of her voice convinced him that it was not disapproval, but before he could begin to wonder what it was, she had left the room and closed the door behind her.

For some time after that, she did not stop to talk to him in the mornings, but put down his hot water quickly and as quickly went away, saying no more than the time it was, or informing him if the day were fine or wet.

One morning, having tried to draw her into conversation and failed, he was conscious of a sense of annoyance as the door closed, and at breakfast that

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same day, seeing her pay some little unaccustomed attention to his father, who looked up at her with a grateful and half proprietary smile, Dicky allowed himself to be satirically amused.

But in time this little incident of the charcoal study was forgotten by both of them. From failing to draw her into conversation, Dicky slowly succeeded, and then one Sunday, when Mr. Furlong had gone to Eckington in the afternoon to read the lessons at a special service, these two found themselves alone in the house.

The day was still brilliant in the light of a late autumn sun, and upstairs in his bedroom, putting the last touches to his etching of the spider's web, Dicky stood up, feeling that he could no longer stay indoors. The sight of Mrs. Flint passing down the path between the now fading Michaelmas daisies in the garden below made him run downstairs for his hat and follow her.

She turned at the sound of his running and waited for him to come up with her. The look of anticipation in her face turned to pleasure when he said that if she were going for a walk, he would come, too.

"I thought you wanted me for something in the house," said she, and, with a smile that was to herself alone, swung in her step with his.

They walked in the old direction of Bredon Hill, and for some little while in silence. Thoughts were crowding in on him no doubt, for this was the first time he had been there since the days of Dorothy and his youth. And who shall say what filled the



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silence for her? She had shown pleasure at the realisation of his companionship; perhaps then it was just the ring of his feet on the hard road keeping time with hers. Such little things in such moments as these are often the sum of all a woman asks.

"Did the pater ever tell you that I ran away from home to learn painting?" he asked presently—the first words that had been spoken.

"Yes," said she.

"Did he tell you what he thought about it?" then realising the moment he had put the question that doubtless she was in his confidence, that his father might tell her things which he would never say to Dicky himself, he took it quickly back. "No—I don't really want to know," said he; "besides it isn't really fair to ask you."

An expression of surprise set back the look of pleasure which had been in her face. Until that instant, even all through their silence, she had been conscious of a warm sense of enjoyment, but now, half guessing what he meant by this, felt the chill almost as of a rebuke. Yet even guessing his meaning, she was not content to let it rest in any doubt. Without giving time to consider the result of her question, she asked him what he meant.

He had not expected this, had taken it for granted that she would let it pass in understanding and say no more. When then she glanced at him because he did not reply, and found his face hot in confusion, she knew his meaning swift enough.

There was but one thing to do, to repeat her ques-



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tion and as casually as she could, to which he gave some evasive answer, too late to deceive the quickness of her mind. Dicky knew that Mr. Furlong was in love with her; he knew also that she was content that it should be so. Yet she was conscious of annoyance that he had found it out. For it was quite true. She was content, more than content, that Mr. Furlong should so regard her.

From the first day that she had taken up her place as housekeeper in the Mill she had admitted to herself that the position of mistress would be preferable, and though not given to scheming or plotting in any matter, she had watched with undisguised satisfaction the growth of a genuine affection in the miller's heart.

So far she had given him no definite signs that these feelings were reciprocated, therefore, perhaps for that reason alone, she was annoyed to find Dicky discovering it so soon. It made her a little afraid of him. She believed that it put her on her guard. He was young. No doubt he considered it unnatural for a woman of her age to marry a man so many years older than herself. Her cheeks grew hot in hatred of the thought that he should ever think such things. For there was no denying it. She was young. Nearly as young as this boy beside her.

However, she had too much pride in herself to let such feelings burn in her for long. After they had walked on in silence again, she spoke of his work, and then of Constance and the child whom she had left. Here she spoke very gently, yet all the time



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watching his face with quick glances of sympathetic curiosity.

"There are times even now," said he, "when I feel that even my work's not worth while. She was so splendid—she was, indeed."

Mrs. Flint bent her head.

"But never think your work's not worth while," said she, feeling that in death this Constance had become his enemy; believing that she, in life, though she was nothing to him, might yet be more than the dangerous memory of the woman he loved. "I don't know anything about your painting. I wish I did; I might be of some use. But don't you forget that what a man has to do—his work—is far the most important thing about him. He's—isn't it what you call—a cypher without it. You mustn't say that about your work."

He looked up with a smile which she could almost have imagined had touched her heart. "Mustn't I?" said he.

Here she began to learn something of the child in him which in most men so often grows old. He could listen to advice from anyone as if it were at his mother's knee, but acquired his own wisdom from it and in his own way.

"Where is the child now?" she asked presently.

"With my mother-in-law," said he.

"Why don't you send him down here to the Mill and let me look after him?"

"You?" He looked up quickly into her face. "Why should you be bothered with him?"



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"Bothered!" she laughed softly to herself. "I don't think I should find him any bother. You see I had no children when I was married. I'd look after him."

Dicky learnt nothing from her when she said this. His mind centred upon Mrs. Baldwin, left alone in her oil-shop in Drury Lane, with no interest in life remaining but to measure out pints of paraffin and sell her bundles of wood.

"I wish it were possible," said he; "but it isn't. I couldn't take him away from Mrs. Baldwin. It'd be too cruel. Besides, the pater mightn't care for it."

But this desire had taken hold of Mrs. Flint. Even she was not conscious why at that moment she wanted Dicky's child more than anything in the world, and, finding her desire thwarted, she still made a struggle to obtain it, saying in that importunate moment something which no other stress of circumstance would have driven her to disclose.

"Your father wouldn't mind if I asked him," said she.

Dicky looked round at her and smiled.

"I expect you're right there," said he; "but I'm afraid it doesn't really alter the case. It'd take all the interest out of Mrs. Baldwin's life if I brought Harry away."

This was the first time he had mentioned his son's name, the name which Constance and he had decided upon before the child was born. For such were the children they had been. They had wanted a son;



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they had said it must be a son, and surely enough a son it was—the only known method that there is of determining this delicate matter of sex.

Mrs. Flint forgot his smile in her own sense of bitter disappointment; for this idea which had come so suddenly to her mind had as suddenly obsessed her. It was her attitude towards life that she had determined it should not be a disappointment, yet here there seemed nothing to be done but to accept the inevitable.

With a deep breath she said she supposed he was right, then, a few moments later expressed her intention of turning towards home.

"Well—let's come back a different way," said he. "We haven't done much more than two miles yet."

She accepted his suggestion in silence, unaware, because of the bitterness she felt, that her very acceptance was proof of pleasure at the thought. For had she not been pleased, that sense of disappointment must have led her home the quickest way. She would have found need to be alone.

He brought her back by Elmly Castle, some miles out of the direct road to the Mill, and soon they were talking once more as if she had neither asked for nor he had denied her anything.

"Your father told me one day," she said, when they were yet some distance from home, "that you were engaged to be married before you went to London. Is that really true?"

"The pater tells you a lot of things," said he.

"Why? Did it matter?"

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"Oh, no—it didn't matter. I was engaged."

"But weren't you very young?"

"Eighteen."

She smiled as she glanced at him, but finding his face quite serious, her smile died away.

"I should have called that young," said she. "But I expect you were old for your years, weren't you?"

"Do I seem old now?" he asked.

"No—you seem very young now. Much younger than one would expect from what you've been through. But I think when men get younger as they grow up, it's generally because they've had very little youth. Were you seriously engaged at eighteen?"

He nodded his head.

"Oh—yes—it was serious enough," said he.

"Then what broke it off?"

He shrugged his shoulders and then he told her, told her without reference to Constance, without suggesting all that had existed between Dorothy and himself.

"She thought I ought to have stayed on in the Mill," he concluded. "She thought our only chance of marrying was by my doing that. I couldn't really make her see what I meant to do, and the pater wouldn't let us marry straight away."

"Why not?"

The note of curiosity came too quickly for him, it was too quickly gone.

"He thought I was too young—that it wasn't decent for a boy of my age to have the feelings that I had. He said I must wait."



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Bitterness came back with the memory of that Sunday when they had talked of it by the weir. He spoke bitterly, almost passionately, and Mrs. Flint wanted to look at him, but found some timidity, keeping her eyes away from his face.

"I expect you were a difficult boy to bring up," said she; yet had never intended to say it. The words had come from her tongue, but the thought of it was not in her mind. Indeed, she was conscious only of confusion, confusion that became suddenly arrested as he said:

"I'm going to ask you something."

"Well?" she replied.

"Of course I suppose it's awful cheek, but I don't mean it a bit like that, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you just shut me up and said we'd talk about something else."

"Well?" she repeated, and knew that her heart was unaccountably still.

But having gone so far he suddenly saw the enormity of what their conversation was leading him to say when, feeling the burning to his forehead, he cursed himself for being a fool.

"What is it?" she continued quietly, for she knew so well what was in his mind that it seemed better then to have it said. Somehow, too, she felt in this moment it were wiser that he knew what she admitted to herself to be the truth. And it were better, she told herself, that he knew it at once.

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied quickly. "Only something I thought of saying, and then realised that,

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after all, it's no business of mine, that for all I know I might be making mischief, which is a silly, rotten thing to do."

"I think you might say it was business of yours," said she. "After all, Mr. Furlong's your father."

He looked at her in bewilderment, wondering how she had known. And she, setting her lips now that it was said, told herself she had chosen the better course. Though where it was better or how it might have been worse, she gave herself no liberty to think.

"Isn't that what you were going to speak about?" she asked.

Dicky gave his admissions with a glance.

"How did you know?" he enquired.

"Well—all our conversation about you had been leading up to it, and I suppose you couldn't be staying in the house without seeing things, especially as I think your observation is quicker than most people's."

He could not restrain the little thrill of pleasure as he heard her say that.

"Now what was it you were going to ask?" she said. Yet even then he hesitated, feeling like a foolish child in her hands in such a matter as this. But, determined for that elusive better course to have it out, she prompted him once more.

"You want to know," she said, "whether I should marry your father if he asked me to."

By some movement of the head, by some little gesture, he showed his assent.

"Do you think I shouldn't?" she asked.

"No—of course not. Why should I?" said he.



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"You might think I was too young?"

"No—I shouldn't have said that."

Some thought twisted a wry smile to her lips.

"Do you know how old I am?" she asked.

"Twenty-eight," said Dicky.

"Yes—twenty-eight."

The wry smile was there once more. This time she knew the thought which brought it. It was because she could still tell the truth about a matter on which many women so situated might have lied.

"And you don't think that too young?"

Believing it would hurt her if he said he did, he shook his head.

"Then you would marry him?" said he.

He did not see her bite her lip. He only heard her quiet determination as she said—"Yes."

By now they were far out on a lonely road, and a quick impulse made him stretch out his hand. She took it as impulsively as he gave it, and when in obedience to another impulse, which he believed he understood, he raised it to his lips, a wave of emotion mounted in her throat.

She swallowed it back and tried to smile.

CHAPTER IX

THIS common knowledge was swift to place them on a different footing. Before even they had reached the Mill, Dicky at least felt more at his ease with her.

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"Fancy," said he with a laugh. "You'll be my step-mother."

"You're taking a great deal for granted," she replied quickly, and she tried to laugh as she said it, tried to make light of the matter to his mood. "Your father may never ask me. And surely you don't suppose I'm going to ask him."

"P'raps you don't know him as well as I do," said Dicky. "He's thinking what's right and what's wrong, and what's wise and what's unwise, and when he can make it all right and all wise to himself, which, if he wants to, he'll do quick enough, then he'll ask you, and then you'll say—yes—and then you'll be my step-mother." He looked up at her and laughed with a gentle amusement at the thought of it.

But there was no gentle amusement in her mind. She felt no desire to laugh with him. An uncomfortable sensation had taken possession of her. She believed that life, for some reason which she did not offer to explain to herself, was going to be a disappointment after all. Then a mood of depression pursued her, but she fought against it bravely till they reached the Mill. As soon, however, as she found the opportunity, she went alone to her room, there, vigourously washing her hands, tidying her hair, and at every moment saying, below her breath, yet emphatically, "You fool—you silly fool." At last, looking in the glass, she said aloud, "Emma—you're twenty-eight—go downstairs and boil those eggs for tea."



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Even Dicky had been constrained to thoughtfulness by the silence of the last few minutes of their walk. He, too, was going to his bedroom, but with a mind turning to his work, when his father confronted him in the sitting-room. Darkness had fallen by then. There were no lights burning in the house. Had the place been less familiar it would have been a groping of his way. But in a room he knew so well, Dicky found a path easily to the door. He was just about to open it when a voice coming out of the shadows of the big armchair arrested him with a jerk and a moment's beating of the heart.

"Been for a walk?" asked Mr. Furlong out of the darkness.

Dicky still reached for the handle of the door. He found it and turned it in his hand. After that instant's heart-beat, he felt no inclination to stay and talk to his father. An instinct rising out of the darkness of that room, out of the mere fact of Mr. Furlong sitting there without the lights, warned him that something was the matter. In the darkness of his own mind, he half divined what it was.

"Yes—went out to Bredon and came round by Elmly Castle," said he, and was about to pass through the door on his way to his bedroom.

"With—with Mrs. Flint? Did she go with you?" The miller's voice was strained, but it was quiet. There was nothing to do but stand there at the open door and answer him.

"Yes—she came with me—well—rather I saw her going out first, so I joined her."

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Here Dicky found his voice was strained to naturalness, too. He realised it, and realised it in his father, while Mr. Furlong realised it in him and realised it in his own voice as well. Yet each one thought it were impossible that the other should notice it.

"I've been sitting here," said the miller, "waiting for someone to come and light up."

"Was Lizzie out, too, then?" asked Dicky.

"No—but I don't like that girl to be meddling with the lamps. It's not safe. She doesn't understand them like Mrs. Flint does."

Dicky felt his blood hot. This concealed rebuke, hidden in the self-imposed martyrdom of his father, was irritating because it was unanswerable.

"Well—why didn't you light them yourself?" said he; "unless I suppose you wanted to sit in the dark."

"No—I didn't want to," replied the poor man, feeling that his position was a weak one, yet hating with that old hatred to lose in dignity and authority to his son. "But I employ Mrs. Flint and Mrs. Flint always lights the lamps. I was waiting—I've been waiting this half-hour for Mrs. Flint to do them."

"I'm sorry," said Dicky, with what humility that heat of his blood would let him. "I suppose I ought not to have taken her round by Elmly Castle. I didn't think about the lamps."

"Oh—I suppose you'd a lot to talk about," persisted Mr. Furlong, unable to keep that unhappy



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ring of irony from his voice. "You talked about your painting and all that sort of thing, I expect."

"Yes—we talked about my work a bit."

"She's very interested in it—isn't she?"

"Well—I don't know—what little she knows about it."

"There's, of course, a tremendous lot to know—isn't there?" said Mr. Furlong, and felt that he was outstepping the natural bounds of his dignity, yet could not call himself back. "You have to be immensely clever to know anything at all—haven't you?" he added.

"You have to be pretty clever," said Dicky, "to know when to stop being clever."

"Oh—have you—but what's that got to do with painting?"

"It has to do with everything in this world," Dicky replied, and knowing that he dared not trust himself to say more, he went out quickly, closing the door behind him, leaving his father in that voluntary darkness out of which there was no escape from the bitterness of his own thoughts.

For still some minutes longer he sat there waiting for Mrs. Flint, and when she did not come, he rose from his chair. With a trembling hand he pulled the old-fashioned bell.

It was not long before the door opened again.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Lizzie, sir."

"Light the lamps," said he.

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CHAPTER X

FROM that day of their walk to Elmly Castle, Mrs. Flint felt dimly the extent of the power of her influence with Dicky.

Women are subconscious creatures, acting upon impulses of which either they cannot or will not explain the meaning even to themselves. Subconsciously she realised how readily he answered to any encouragement of his work. Subconsciously, too, she divined how dangerous was his memory of Constance to all the ambitions which he held. But most subconsciously of all, hidden so far in her deepest thoughts that no word of it ever reached her mind, she was aware how, when once brought back into the full stream of his energies, the despair in his mind would vanish as the warmth of the sun dispersed those mists of the October mornings.

Therefore when once that despair in him was gone, how else but as a man with all the natural ardour of his youth, could he regard the life that spread before him? This, indeed, it was she needed, and for some reason which to herself she never gave opportunity to explain. It was to this end, in that inner subconsciousness of herself, she knew that she was pledged.

It is seldom that women can be convicted, for it is so seldom they know what they have honestly attempted until it is irretrievably done. Until that moment they are capable of, and justified in, denying any accusation.



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In those early days, had Mrs. Flint been accused of setting out to ensnare the affections of Dicky Furlong, most vehemently she would have denied it. Had she not, almost at the very outset, admitted her intent of accepting his father's proposal of marriage should it ever be made? Had she not, where many another woman might have given him a lie, told boldly and fearlessly the truth about her age?

What deception, what ensnaring was there in that? Indeed, in those days her conscience was quite clear, as truly would any other woman's have been.

For she said to herself, "If the boy does fall in love with me—well, then that'll be as things turn out. He's seen more of the world than I have; he's nearly as old—" and having said so much, she shrugged her shoulders and went about her duties of the house.

One day, during her weekly shopping in Pershore, she had occasion to go into a chemist's shop and, while waiting for a parcel to be prepared for her, picked up from the counter a tube of lip-salve, reading the description of its advantages on the paper label that wrapped it round.

"Invaluable for dry lips," it ran, "saves the skin from cracking while it imparts a natural and healthy colour—" and so on and so on.

The chemist was out of the shop. She was alone, with a sudden impulse and her own curiosity. In that moment she had taken off the cap, rubbing the contents of the tube on the back of her hand. A faint mark, the colour of carmine, remained on her skin. Then, hearing the chemist returning, she

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screwed the cap on quickly, laid it back on the counter where she had found it, and, as he came into the shop, believed that her heart was beating from fear of discovery alone.

As she took her parcel, she picked up the little tube again, inquiring of the chemist what it was for.

"For the lips, madam," said he; "for cracking lips. Some ladies use it for givin' themselves just a bit of colour, at least that's what I believe myself, because I sell a good deal of it. But it is good stuff for crackin' skin—I do know that. Do you suffer that way, madam?"

Mrs. Flint swallowed the sensation in her throat and said, "Yes," her eyes full on the chemist's face, her voice as calm and quiet as it had ever been in her life. "How much is it?" she enquired.

"Sixpence, madam."

She took the money out of her purse, laid it casually upon the counter, picked up the tube of lip-salve, and went out.

Even then she did not fully realise why she had bought it. Indeed, for many days it lay away in the back of a drawer in her dressing-table, though, while never forgetting it was there, she made no attempt to use it.

At last one day she took it out. Her hand found it in the recess of the drawer when she was looking for something else. Then she examined it again, saying, just audibly to herself, "Fancy if I ever get like one of those women who make themselves up," whereupon common sense and all the training of her



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youth brought a smile to her eyes. She felt inclined to laugh at herself, and laid the foolish thing back in the drawer where she had found it, adding in an impulse of practical economy, "What a waste of sixpence."

Yet she looked at the colour of her lips in the glass, and, finding them somewhat pale, sucked one and then the other in her mouth until the blood was hot in them. Having done this, she blew out the candle on the dressing-table and went away to prepare the high tea.

The year was into November now. The elms were fading to their splashes of yellow, and all the beech trees had turned to brilliant orange. The lanes about Bredon were strewn with a carpet of leaves; the earth was manuring the earth for the generous fecundity of the spring.

Under the influence of Dicky's work, Mrs. Flint began to notice those beauties of the country which she had never thought of regarding before. Standing sometimes by his window when she had called him, she would look out, remarking on the effects of the colour of the day it was, stimulating him, intentionally perhaps, to the energy to rise and see the beauty of these things for himself.

It was ever her determination then to rouse him from his moods of self-centred contemplation, when she knew that he was still torturing his mind with memories of his Constance.

Constance, she realised, must have been a very great woman indeed, so great a nature as robbed her



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of all comparison. And it was never to take the place of Constance to which she aspired. She would have saved Dicky from himself; would have been the gentle means of bringing him back to the energy of his work. For when she found him silent in his moods, sitting at his drawing-board with eyes fixed far across the country that lay before him, yet seeing nothing but the streets of London, his ears hearing nothing but the hum of traffic and the familiar hawkers' cries, then, feeling as though his back were turned upon her, she strove to bring his mind back from the past.

It was not so hard a matter as one might have supposed. In those few weeks at the Mill, Mrs. Flint had made herself the only woman essential to his mind. He was young, and the energy in him to be up and doing was only numbed and stifled in his soul. It was not dead altogether.

In sudden fits of vitality he would work unceasingly for three or four days together, as suddenly dropping into listlessness, from which only the common sense and stirring advice of Mrs. Flint could waken him.

It is not to be wondered at that gradually his mind came to lean on her. No woman could so earnestly have striven for his welfare and not had some effect upon him; yet conscious of that effect, he had no certain thought of what it was.

One morning early, as she stood beside his window, saying how the rain-clouds were chasing up out of the south-east, he half sat up in bed and said her name.



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She looked round quickly, as quickly setting the expression of her face to one of casual interest, lest he should see the alertness of her mind to the mere sound of his voice.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Do you really take a lot of interest in my work?"

"Certainly—of course I do."

"But why?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because you don't know anything about it. Until I came to the Mill, I don't believe you'd ever thought how a picture was painted. I remember your saying once that you had never thought a picture had meant anything much when it was done except that it was pretty. Something like that you said. I don't know whether you used the word pretty—but that was what you meant. And for a painting to be pretty—is for it to be damned."

"Is it?" said she, unable to trust herself to more words than this.

"Yes—that's why I ask if you really take an interest in my work?"

"Well—I've said, of course I do. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes—I believe you right enough, if you say so. But it seems funny taking an interest in anything that you don't really understand."

"Perhaps it is," said she, "whether I understand it or not, because I think one day that you're going to be a very big man."

He sat up further in the bed. He leant out across



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the pillows looking fast into her face, with eyes lit up and hair tossed wild across his forehead. And then it was, in one sudden moment of illumination, that she knew she loved him.

The sudden knowledge almost overwhelmed her. In that quick moment the natural balance of her mind swayed unsteadily. She felt as though an abyss were at her feet, and the swift sight of that chasm below chilled her with fear at the thought that she could not resist the overpowering desire to fling herself into the alluring depths.

There came with it, too, all the physical accompaniment of such fear. She felt a sick weakness as she stood there by the window. Her limbs trembled. Quickly she laid one hand on the window-sill.

"Do you really mean that?" asked Dicky.

It was hearing that almost pathetic enthusiasm of the child, knowing at the same time that it came from the heart of a man who would do all the great things she believed of him, that brought home, into the very depths of Mrs. Flint's heart, the knowledge that she loved Dicky Furlong. Then she could trust herself no longer. This was the moment when the stress of circumstance might break down all her reserve.

As though a voice had suddenly called her, she moved quickly to the door. Once that was open and she felt that safety was in reach, she turned round.

"Yes—I really mean that," said she, and left him, sitting up in the bed, clasping his knees, staring in



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front of him with all his ambitions burning like two beacons in his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

FOR the next few days, until she had trained herself into a calm state of control, Mrs. Flint wasted no moments in talking to Dicky in the mornings. She just deposited his jug of hot water on the washhandstand and went out, sometimes without a word passing her lips.

In a state of half-wakefulness Dicky had let her go, only realising when he began to get up, how something seemed missing in the morning, dimly aware that the day had not begun as it used.

For three or four mornings he set his mind to be awake when she came in; but the effort failed. Before he was really conscious of her presence in the room, she had gone and the tacit belief in him, that this was the only opportunity when he could speak to her without offending his father, kept him silent on the subject for the rest of the day. Indeed, this seemed to be a natural understanding between them both, for at meals, or on any occasion when they met in his father's presence, they had little or nothing to say to each other.

It was on the fifth morning after their last conversation that Dicky found himself wide awake, waiting for the sounds of her footsteps up the stairs. When first they reached his ears he sat up in bed,

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conscious of a thrill of excitement, believing it to be the excitement of one who achieves the success of his endeavours.

The door opened, when, with a laugh, half of that same excitement, he greeted her with a wakeful good-morning.

"I've tried to catch you the last three or four times," said he; "but you'd slipped out before I could properly wake up. What's the matter?"

She professed innocence. Laid the jug of water down, and looked at him with eyebrows raised in simple questioning.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

"Well—why don't you stop and talk now as you used to?"

"My dear Dicky—I've got my work in the house," said she. "Don't you know that the morning is the busiest part of the day for me?"

"But you used to stop before, and the last four days I've been working like a nigger. I thought you were interested in my work. You haven't asked to see any of it at all."

"Haven't I?" She looked down at the bed, smiling at him, dimly realising the supreme selfishness of this, consciously glad that she had the power in her to draw it from him. "Well—where is it?" she went on. "Show me what you've done."

He pointed to the portfolio leaning up against the wall.

"Two etchings in there," said he; "and the wood block all ready for printing."



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She took out the etchings, looking at them for long in the light of the window. One was the dried seedpods of hemlock, the other, a little master study of the spider's web.

"I wish I could see things as beautifully as you do," said she. "In all your work you know there's something of you that's almost more interesting than the thing itself."

It was not a fair criticism, for it was true only to her. Loving him as she now admitted she did, that was all she looked for in his work; it was all she cared to find.

"That's not much good to me, then," said he on a note of disappointment. "Because I'm not anybody. You said the other day I was going to be a big man—of course it makes one excited to hear a thing like that; but it isn't true. I don't feel like a big man. I don't feel it inside me. A big man isn't conscious of himself like I am. I know what I'm doing all the time I'm at it. What I feel about trees, for instance, the meanings I see in them, the giant that's in the oak and the ploughman in the elm, the princess in the poplar, and all those sorts of things—well, I can see them as I look at them, long before I ever put a drop of paint on my brush. And then, knowing what I'm doing, I paint them like that. I try to get hold of their personalities. What a beastly word that—personality—is! It's nearly as cheap as Art. Anyhow, that's the way I see them, and that's the way I know I'm painting them. I know when I paint a poplar that

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I can get the meaning, and the form even, of a princess into it. On a day when the sun's up in the summer, she's got on all her jewels, and the backs of the leaves glitter with the breeze. And when there's a storm, and the rain's beating on her, and the wind's bending her, then her hair's blown loose from her forehead, and her skirts are swept against her body, but she's still a princess. The old ploughman in the elm would stand heavily in his field to watch her. And, don't you see, I know that I'm doing all that. I can feel myself meaning to do it. That's why I shall never be a big man. I know too much about myself."

He finished almost out of breath, convincing her more than ever of all he was to be.

"And all this time," said she, "you've been telling me something about yourself which you know nothing of."

In bewildered surprise he asked her what she meant.

"I can't explain things like you can," she replied; "but I know what I mean. Surely it doesn't matter that you know you see things like that. There's something in you first of all which has the eyes to see them. And it's that in you of which you know nothing. I don't see poplar trees or elm trees like that until you tell me of it."

"But you see them now," said he in triumph.

"Yes—I see them now. You've lent me the eyes of that part of you of which you are just as unconscious as any big man has ever been. I don't know



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if that's what I mean, but I know what I'm trying to say."

He sat in his favourite attitude in bed, with his knees tucked up to his chin, trembling in himself at the thought that there might be great things for him to do. Mrs. Flint stood there by the window watching him, wondering what would be the issue of it all; asking the least, as many a woman does, that she just might be allowed to continue calling him in the morning, just that she might stand at his window, talking as then, while he sat in the bed with his knees tucked up under his chin.

That silence between them had lasted a long moment, when out of the stillness of the house came the sound of a voice that broke it into a thousand pieces, lifting Dicky's head swiftly from his knees, and causing Mrs. Flint hurriedly to put down the etchings in her hand. It was Mr. Furlong, calling his housekeeper's name.

Just one look, the briefest, passed between them. Then she walked, with what control of haste she could summon, to the door.

"I'm here, Mr. Furlong," she called out, then closed the door behind her as she left the room.

Still sitting up in bed Dicky strained his ears, listening for any sound which might follow. Everything was silent. At last he got out of bed and slowly dressed himself.

He had had no walk that morning. Indeed there had been no time; therefore, when breakfast was over, he was eager to get back to his bedroom

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studio to begin his work. The wood-block, as he had told Mrs. Flint, was ready for its printing. Only the slightest finishing touches were needed upon it before he could take it up to London. With any fortune at all, he hoped to take it the next day.

Mr. Furlong followed him out the dining-room to the foot of the stairs, and, as he mounted the first step, held him back with an unexpected question.

"How's the work getting on, Dicky?" he asked.

"Oh—very well—I think."

"What are you doing now?"

"Well—this morning I just want to finish my wood-block—I'm going to take it up to London tomorrow for printing. Mr. Nibbs has got my press there at his place."

"Can I come up and have a look at it?" asked his father.

With a certain amount of surprise, because for the last few weeks Mr. Furlong had never spoken of his work, Dicky gave a ready consent, plunging immediately into an enthusiastic account of all he expected the wood-engraving to turn out, taking two steps of the stairs at a time in his eagerness to be at it.

With feelings confused between admiration and envy of that limitless energy of his son, Mr. Furlong followed more slowly after him.

When the five blocks of wood, scored and chiselled, looking, just as Mrs. Beasley in Great Queen Street had once said, like some children's puzzle,

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were stood against the wall in front of him, the good man did his best to be interested, strove genuinely to regard them with a proper intelligence. Yet all the time his mind was consumed with the thought of what he had really followed Dicky there to say. He scarcely heard the words with which his son described the method of printing, and all the various effects of atmosphere he hoped to get. Still less did he understand what they meant. But spurred on by the belief that his father must be interested, Dicky talked till the words almost tumbled one over the other.

Here, indeed, was the artist, the man whom Mr. Furlong could never hope to understand. All that he could conceive, as he listened to the continuous sound of the words, was that Dicky perhaps was not in love with Mrs. Flint. But could it be that she was in love with him? The thought shook him to his heart as he contemplated it.

But what was there, he wondered, for a woman of Mrs. Flint's age to love in this boy who, in all his enthusiasms proved still how much a child he was? What, after all, was this painting, all this making of pictures? It was a child's business at best. He could think of it as little else. A woman might occupy her time with it. Surely not a man. If he made a living by it—well and good. It was right that every man should support himself, and certainly in his own way. That was fair; that was just. He would always be just. That, at least, should be said of him.



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But what was this making of pictures as a business in life compared, for example, to his own, the grinding of corn to make bread for the people. He said to himself that it was ludicrous to compare them. All that he did was necessary, in however small a proportion, to the world. But there was not a man in Eckington who would be one whit the worse without a picture on his walls.

How, then, should Mrs. Flint choose between father and son but in his favour? She was not a romantic girl. She had had her sorrow in life and learnt her values. Surely she must realise that his was the most manly choice of the two in the business of the world by which every man must justify himself. He had youth against him, he knew; but what was youth to a woman of her discrimination when it was so employed.

And all this time Dicky was describing the finished and living picture he hoped to make out of those lifeless pieces of wood.

"If I can keep the meaning of all that meadow and the trees and the figures through the mist," said he, "I shall do something with coloured wood-engraving that's never been done before. That'll be something—won't it?"

He put it as a question, but never waited for an answer; was off at a fresh tangent, assuming his father's admission in the silent figure by his side.

"And what do you hope to have done at the end of all this?" asked Mr. Furlong presently. "When, for instance, you're as old as I am, what do you



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hope to have done? If you're leading a revolution in wood-engraving, is that going to do anybody any good if you succeed?"

Dicky looked round at his father, mute for the moment in surprise. He could not see the bitterness of heart which prompted those questions, but the force of them was plain enough to his mind.

"If I can suggest one new thought to any single individual," said he after a brief moment's consideration as to how he should reply, "that's the best that I can hope to do. But of course I shall never do it. One new thought! My heavens! When you think of the millions of ideas that can be bred out of one new thought! Of course I shall never do it, because that's the highest thing a man can possibly do. Christ did it. Shakespeare did it. I suppose Napoleon did it too. Velasquez did it. He could make you see the colossal power of simplicity. Christ made you see the colossal power of altruism."

"I don't like you speaking of Christ like that," said Mr. Furlong, "in the same breath with Shakespeare and Napoleon, and—and the other name you mentioned. I've no doubt they were great men. But Christ was the Son of Man and the Son of God as well."

Dicky felt the breath of his enthusiasm blow cold. This was the barrier he might well have foreseen, and there was no surmounting it.

"Can't you ever regard Christ just as a man," he



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asked, "a man with as fine a philosophy as the world perhaps has ever seen?"

"If Christ was not the Son of God," replied Mr. Furlong, "then all His teaching goes for nothing. His teaching was a lie if He was not the Son of God, because that was what He said He was."

"Very well," said Dicky; "it's no good our arguing—is it? I can't explain what I mean on those lines, because it seems to me that if Christ were really the Son of God, then He didn't do so much for the world after all, because we're still struggling, still fighting, still miserable objects, full of weaknesses, full of meannesses, the very best of us. Two thousand years of Christ's philosophy don't seem to me to have worked such wonders. All that one can suppose is, we should have been a good deal worse without it. Anyhow, what's the good of saying what one hopes to do. The only hope worth having is that you do your best."

"Do you talk this sort of nonsense to Mrs. Flint?" asked Mr. Furlong as soon as he could sufficiently control himself as to speak without heat. But even then, straining that control to its utmost, his lips were thin as he spoke, his words chipped short between his teeth, and in his eyes Dicky saw the light of that old fire betokening his hatred of the ideas that were set against his own.

In an earnest desire not to come to anger with his father, he replied quietly that not to his knowledge had he ever spoken of religion to Mrs. Flint.

"Then I would advise you not to," said Mr. Fur-



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long, "if those are the heretical ideas you hold. I'm glad to say that her sense of religion is keen. I find the Bible good enough for me, and she does too. If she were to hear the things you've said just now, I doubt if she would stay on in the house, and so, if you respect my wishes and my comfort, I should be glad for you never to mention them."

"I certainly never shall," said Dicky. "They're not the sort of things I go everywhere talking about. I don't know that I'd ever thought them before until what you said brought them out of me."

"What I said!" exclaimed Mr. Furlong. "Well, if your thoughts on a subject are as briefly considered as that, I don't think one need pay much attention to them."

With this thrust, to which he felt there was no guard or defence, the good man turned to the door, and at that moment remembered that what he had come upstairs expressly to say was as yet unspoken. Encouraged, however, by what he believed was the success of his attack upon Dicky, it did not seem so difficult now to say. He turned again with his hand upon the door.

"Oh—by the way," said he, "Mrs. Flint calls you in the morning, doesn't she?"

Dicky replied that she did.

"Well—it doesn't seem to me that that's quite as it ought to be," Mr. Furlong continued. "What I mean," he hesitated, for indeed it was more difficult than he had supposed. "She's—she's quite a

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young woman, you know, and—and coming into your bedroom—well—you see what I mean.”

“I don’t,” said Dicky.

“Well—apparently she seems to stay there talking to you.”

“Yes.”

“Well—I don’t think it’s quite proper myself.”

“Don’t you?”

“No, I don’t. If you want someone to call you—there’s Lizzie—she’s the servant for that sort of thing.”

“Lizzie’s nine years younger than Mrs. Flint,” said Dicky.

“What do you mean by that?” his father demanded.

“Only what you mean about Mrs. Flint,” replied Dicky. “But I should think if you aren’t going to trust people, Lizzie’s less to be trusted than she is. I suppose you don’t trust me at all.”

“I remember a conversation we had once by the weir,” said Mr. Furlong, “and it’ll be a long time before I shall forget it. If you must be called, why can’t you call yourself?”

“You’d better speak to Mrs. Flint about that,” said Dicky, and, unable to trust himself any longer, he picked up one of his wood-blocks, though he saw not a line that he had carved on its fretted surface.

For what seemed to him an endless pause, he stood there looking at the block of wood. At last the door closed with a sharp bang, when, flinging



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the block upon the bed, he exclaimed, "My God!" and for the next half-hour leant out of the window looking at the sun dancing on the Avon until his mind was cool.

CHAPTER XII

THE next morning, rising early, even before Mrs. Flint was up, Dicky with his wood-blocks set off for London.

It had memories for him, that journey; brought its recollections of the morning when he had left the Mill to adventure with his fortune in the world. This time he drove in the old trap, but as they passed over Eckington Bridge, where the tithe barn still stood in the meadows beyond, the night before that journey came vividly back to him. He fell to wondering then what the meaning of it all might be.

For that night, indeed, had seemed to bring to him the fill, the brimming-over of human experience. He could recall every moment of it with a lucid and startling memory. And what was it now, in the light of the years that had passed between? Nothing but an incident, a pattern woven into the ever-shifting sands.

Were all the things that seemed so big in life when they happened, were they all like that? If so, then what was the ultimate intention of it all? For Dorothy and that great love of theirs seemed



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nothing to him now. Yet surely it must have had its meaning, must have been designed to some ultimate purpose. And what could that purpose be?

He thought of the other women he had known, his mother, Bertha Geddes, Dorothy, Constance. It was the name of Constance alone that really thrilled him now. Yet even that sensation brought him a feeling of distrust. Would that last forever? His ideal of a man's love for a woman was that he should love her and her memory to the full completion of his life. That was his ideal. That, in a childish way, was how he had felt of Bertha Geddes; that was how he had felt of Dorothy. And his ideal remained the same, yet most utterly had he forgotten these. Could there ever come the time when he would forget his love of Constance too? He shuddered at the thought of it, because he feared it might be so.

Then what was the use of his ideal, if he could never live up to it? With a sudden glimpse into that great future of things, as though for one instant a curtain had been drawn, showing him the hidden secret of the vast and ultimate purpose, he believed he saw how it all meant something in the accomplishment of the work he had set himself to do.

Without that ideal, notwithstanding that he never lived up to it, where could the better impulse of all his work be found?

Then was that the meaning of women in the lives of men? Truly and undeniably the greatest function of a man in the life of a woman was to be the



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father of her child. All other things that he meant to her were but secondary to this.

What, then, was the great and corresponding meaning of women in the lives of men? Surely somewhere and somehow there was a fair exchange. Then could this be it; this feeding of the man's ideal, this stimulus to create which she alone could bring him? Was she the father of the children of his brain as he was the father of the children of her body?

Then where was he, with Constance dead and the whole world bereft of women for him?

All the way up in the train he sat with his elbow resting on the sill of the window, staring out at the racing meadows, at the fleeting trees, and seeing never a thing for the thoughts which travelled ceaselessly in his mind.

For this, as I see it, was the matter of the whole of Dicky Furlong's life, and for all I know, may be matter of many another man's beside. For it may be remembered in this history that Christina, his mother, was the first to stimulate him to endeavour. He did his first drawing of the roses on the wall for her; and so, under the influence of women, he worked all through his life.

Now whether it be true that all men are so is not for me to say. I have merely to record what I know of the life of Richard Furlong, the value of whose work everyone knows as well as I. Certainly he of all men must have learnt before the end what the real purpose of his life had been; how the things



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that happen have only the meaning of their mere significance, that, however cruel or terrible they may be, they are but happenings in the great reality of that purpose which guides all men to their soul's achievement.

At eleven o'clock that morning Dicky walked into the shop in the Waterloo Bridge Road with his five wood-blocks under his arm and a small bag in his hand.

Mr. Nibbs looked up from over his spectacles, blessing his soul aloud, and calling to Emily to see who was in the shop.

"Lor' almighty!" said Emily.

"Still reading, Emily?" said Dicky.

She shut up her book, nodding her head. He looked at the counter behind which Mr. Nibbs was standing with a gold mount half cut in his hand.

"An' me still cutting mounts," said the little man. "Wonderful 'ow you go on, doing the same thin' day in, day out—ain't it? Lor', but you did give us a fright, Mr. Furlong, when you went away."

"'E thought you'd gone and cut your throat," said Emily.

"Well—that's the truth," added Mr. Nibbs. "I did—straight I did. And until we 'eard you'd gone 'ome to Gloucestershire, could I do a bit of work 'ere in the shop. Could I, Emily?"

And Emily said he could not.

Dicky smiled—smiled sadly. It was all fast coming back to him—the sight of these good people

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again, that little shop with its cheap coloured prints, its collection of china rubbish, and its two or three pieces of spurious Sheffield plate, everything he saw revived a fresh memory, stinging his mind to a renewed sense of loss.

"No—I didn't cut my throat," said he; "but if I had, I don't suppose I should have known much about it. I walked home—that was all. It took me four days—don't let's talk about it. You needn't think I've forgotten. Is Mrs. Baldwin all right?"

They nodded their heads like a pair of china figures with wire necks.

"And the baby?"

"Bless 'is 'eart," said Emily, which was an answer good enough in itself. But there was a tone of reproach in her voice as she said it. Often in the last few weeks that Dicky had been away, she had declared that he could have no feelings to leave his son like that.

"'E can't care for the child," she had said, and all that she conveyed in her voice then. But Dicky refused to notice it. For over the matter of his son as yet he had no conscience, except to refuse the request of Mrs. Flint to take him away from Mrs. Baldwin. If it seemed heartless to them, then let it seem so. He could find no love for the thing that had taken Constance out of his life. He had, indeed, been the father to her child, beyond that, in those early days of his sorrow, he wished to be no more.

"Well—where's my printing press, Mr. Nibbs?"



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he said, when the moment of that rebuke had passed. "Have you kept it oiled and cleaned?"

"Every day," replied the little man. "Every morning directly I'd got the shutters down. Why —'ave you got somethin' to print—is that what you've come up for?"

Dicky laid the five blocks down on the counter. With a glance Emily looked at them—foolish, uninteresting things they seemed to her, then she returned to the dog's-eared pages of her novelette. But Mr. Nibbs pored over them with a live excitement, picking up first one and then another, squinting and half closing his eyes to see the picture it was meant to be.

"Landscape and figures, ain't it?" he asked.

"That's it—it's going to be called the 'Mushroom Gatherers,' and it's miles beyond anything I've done yet. Where's the press? In the other room? Couldn't I start and take a pull of them now, just to see how much I shall have to do to finish off? I've got my tools here in the bag. I don't expect there's much to alter."

"Ain't yer goin' up to Drury Lane to see Mrs. Baldwin and the baby first?" asked Emily from her corner.

"No, I'm going to do this first," said Dicky. "You've got to be in the mood to print. Come on, Mr. Nibbs, you can leave the shop for a bit, can't you? You can give me a hand."

He waited no longer, and Mr. Nibbs was at his heels, telling Emily to attend to anyone who came in. Indeed, he was just as excited as Dicky. To



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be present and to help at the printing of one of the Furlong wood-engravings, as he always called them, this was a great event of his life.

With a glow of pride, as though it were his own, he took the linen sheet from off the press, and there stood the machine in all its glorious cleanliness. All the steel upon it was polished bright, the black iron-work shone as though it had just been painted. He turned the wheel, like a child in his pride, and the heavy press yawned smoothly up, ready to take the block.

"There you are," said he, looking up into Dicky's face, and every point of light upon that polished steel was glittering back in Dicky's eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

LONG before Dicky had finished his work on the printing press, Emily had put on that tattered black straw hat of hers and hurried up to Drury Lane to inform Mrs. Baldwin that Dicky was in London.

"Where are yer goin'?" called Mr. Nibbs from the inner room.

"Never you mind," said she, for women are secretive over these little matters. She wanted Mrs. Baldwin to be prepared while seeming to be the recipient of the unexpected.

"But 'ow about the shop?" he persisted, just poking his head round the corner of the door.



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"It's your shop," she replied, "and if you can't look after it, it'll have to look after itself."

That was all the comfort he got out of her. She shut the door sharply after her, and hurried up towards Waterloo Bridge, not so sure of herself as to be unafraid of his following. In a sudden fit of authority, she thought, he well might bring her back to her post of duty.

Two or three times she looked back apprehensively over her shoulder. But once she was hidden in the crowd of pedestrians forever walking to and fro over the broad pavement of the bridge, she felt safe, and continued her way in greater security of mind.

In the oil-shop Mrs. Baldwin was serving her halfpennyworths of paraffin, wrapping up candles in ragged pieces of the daily paper and passing them across the counter into the keeping of the dirty hands stretched out to take them. Her own hands were none too clean, her hair none too tidy. The loss of Constance had made a difference to her. Constance, ever ready to tie her ribbons in a tidier bow, to set straight the little disarrangement of her dress, was no longer an influence in the oil-shop in Drury Lane. That child upstairs, sleeping or crying, stretching out its crumpled fingers to clutch her seared and bony hands which most times smelt of the oil of the shop, this was all she cared about. And as yet there was no sense of tidiness in this son of Dicky Furlong's. He did not care what the hands were like that nursed him. So long as he fed his fill and

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slept his hours of the clock, tidiness or untidiness, they were all one to him.

Therefore when Constance and Dicky were gone, Mrs. Baldwin soon fell into slovenly habits. Regarding her silently across the counter while the last person in the shop made his purchases, Emily quickly realised that something must be done before Dicky came up from the Waterloo Bridge Road. He was not given greatly to tidiness in himself, but knowing somewhat of men, she divined that he might approve of it in others.

As soon, then, as the last customer had gone she made known her surprising news.

"'Oo d'yer think's in London?" she asked.

It might have been the Czar of all the Russias or the Emperor of Germany, when processions to the Guildhall and pageants in Green Park had been an excitement to look forward to; but none of these things having any attraction for Mrs. Baldwin, she guessed the only person who was left with any meaning in her life.

"Dicky," said she, and said it with a fear in her heart against the power that he alone possessed to rob her of the thing she so dearly clung to.

Emily bobbed her head.

"That's it—Dicky Furlong."

"Is he going to take the child?" demanded Mrs. Baldwin.

"Come 'ere," said Emily, "come upstairs. Tell that boy to call you if you're wanted."

Mrs. Baldwin did obediently as was required of



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her. The boy who ran errands took up his position behind the counter with a face expectant that the shop next moment would be full of customers, when his duty it would be to serve them. Indeed, he felt this to be an important moment in his life when Emily and Mrs. Baldwin disappeared upstairs.

They did not speak again until the door of the upper room was closed behind them. Then Mrs. Baldwin repeated her question.

"Did 'e say 'e was goin' to take the child?"

"'E 'ardly said anythin' about it," replied Emily. "Why 'e doesn't care for the poor little thing no more than if it 'ud never been born to 'im. All 'e thinks about is 'is pictures. They're all alike—men! Mr. Nibbs is just the same. You'd think they'd got 'old of a five-pound note, instead of them rotten bits of wood 'e brought along with 'im. Yer know it beats me—it does—upon me oath. To think of 'is 'aving a child of 'is own, 'ere in London, and him away from the place for six weeks an' more—wouldn't the first thing you'd do be to go and see that child the minute what you got back? It would mine. Wouldn't it yours?"

Mrs. Baldwin nodded her head. She was still only wondering if Dicky's intention were to take his son away, yet realised at the same time from the distant tone in Emily's voice that this affirmative was required of her.

"Well, yer need 'ave no fear," Emily went on, "that 'e's goin' to take the boy away from yer. All I'm afraid of is, now that Constance is gone, 'e

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won't 'ave nothin' more to do with it. The poor little mite won't 'ave a proper father, and that's no proper way to start a young child in life—is it? Well—of course it isn't."

Women are like this. Their hearts are so large. Out of strength cometh sweetness—it might well, too, be said that out of the largeness of a woman's heart cometh the whole world.

They talked like this, these two, for half an hour together, the upshot of the whole business being that Mrs. Baldwin was tidied and made to look respectable. She washed her hands; she put on a clean blouse, a clean apron. Between them both they set the parlour to rights, that same parlour where Dicky had had his first meal with Constance. When everything was to their satisfaction, the baby was brought in from Mrs. Baldwin's room; and then, indeed, there was much to be done between two women, who thought that every little touch was of vital importance.

The uncomplaining little creature was seated first of all on Mrs. Baldwin's lap and then on Emily's while they put on those garments—so-called his best—which Mrs. Baldwin had made with her own hands in the long evenings after the shop was closed, and there was nothing else in the world for a woman to do.

They thought he looked splendid, and in the various ways of women told him so, to all of which he listened with big eyes blinking, his toes curling and uncurling in the pink woollen socks which his



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grandmother had knitted, as good, as they told him every other moment, as gold; which in Drury Lane, indeed, is good enough.

One would not have supposed he looked so splendid to Dicky when he arrived. The two women were vastly disappointed with the reception of their efforts. In silence they stood by, waiting for the raptures, which, to their minds, were only human in such a case. But there were none of these raptures to be found in Dicky. For, if the truth were told, he was in secret dread of this son of his. Those big round eyes searched him unflinchingly; searched them, it seemed, in silent accusation.

He remembered his thoughts as he came up in the train from Pershore. Had Constance been the father of the children of his brain, as he had been the father of this child of her body? Then how infinitely greater a thing had she created than ever in the whole life of his work he could hope to reach.

When on a sudden impulse, hoping to reach his heart, Mrs. Baldwin thrust his son into his arms, Dicky stood like one stricken in sudden fear, trembling lest this wriggling mass should make its escape from his arms and tumble to the floor.

Such a moment as this it may well be when women must wonder what is the real meaning of all this talk about the superiority of men.

Indeed Mrs. Baldwin and Emily, as they stood there, watching Dicky's clumsy and futile efforts to get the child at rest in his arms, with a swift glance at each other, came to the opinion that this was no



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man to be afraid of. With that lightning intuition of their sex, they knew he was afraid of them. Whereupon, as so often happens with those who suddenly learn their strength, they proceeded to bully him.

"Good 'Eavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Baldwin, and with some asperity, "that ain't no way to 'old a child!"

With rough hands in which there was no touch of sympathy, Emily caught his arm and placed it as it should be about the infant's body.

"You needn't think 'e'll bite yer," said she as she did it. "'E's been brought up better'n that, 'asn't 'e, Mrs. Baldwin?"

"'E's 'ad all the best of what I can give 'im," declared the good woman with meaning.

Most effectually did they have him at their mercy then, and most painfully did Dicky feel it. When at last he handed his son back to Mrs. Baldwin, she took him with all the ease a woman can hold a child—a facility that is a note of triumph in itself.

"Do you want your old room?" she asked.

Dicky nodded his head, adding that if it were convenient he would take his things there at once.

As soon as he had closed the door, they looked at each other again.

"No fear of 'im taking the child away from yer," said Emily. "'E wouldn't know what to do with it."

Mrs. Baldwin was rocking the infant to and fro, soothing it against its late discomfort. She had



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nothing to say to that. Her fears were all vanished. If Dicky had ever had it in his mind to take his son away, she knew she had shamed him out of that intention.

Emily fastened the one button that remained upon her coat and turned to the door.

"I just came up," said she, "just to let yer know 'e was comin'. Lor'! what 'elpless things men are —aren't they!"

And with this remark she nodded her head as a parting and was gone. Mr. Nibbs was finishing the cutting of his mount when she returned.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN the first wood-blocks of the "Mushroom Gatherers" were finally worked upon and ready for the machine, there came a day when, from the opening of the shop to the putting up of the shutters, Dicky and Mr. Nibbs were closeted alone in the little room where the printing press was kept.

I know, for I have seen Richard Furlong at work upon it, what a thrilling experience this moment of printing is. It called forth all the nervous intensity of his temperament. He printed, so he always said, at white heat, his hands working nervously in response to the eager activity of his brain.

That day lived long in Mr. Nibbs' memory, convinced him, beyond any hesitation in his mind, of the



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power of Dicky's genius. For with all his nerves upon that fine edge of expectation, fearing failure, pursuing success, his sudden outbursts of temper frightened Mr. Nibbs into a ready and unquestioning obedience.

"Bless my soul, I might have been a boy runnin' errands," he told Emily afterwards. To which promptly enough, remembering too, perhaps, those moments of Dicky's impotence with the baby in his arms, she replied he must have been a fool.

But Mr. Nibbs was not prepared to admit that. He did not, therefore, confess he had been called one, because that had only been, in a manner of speaking, the outcome of one of Dicky's sudden moments of indignation. If the truth were known, the little man believed he had been of considerable help in turning out what to him was a stupendous miracle in the art of coloured wood-engraving.

As one by one the first print received its impressions from the different blocks, now in a tone of green, now of grey, now on the press again until all five colours had been stamped upon its surface, the mind of Mr. Nibbs grew in wonder at the mind of Dicky, who had conceived it all from the beginning.

"Is it coming all right?" he would ask in a hushed whisper as Dicky examined each impression. But time after time it was all wrong. The ink was too thick, then the ink was too thin. Sheet after sheet was torn up with a curse from Dicky, as the whole process began all over again.

"Well—I wouldn't be an artist—I'm damned if



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I would," Mr. Nibbs had said—and if he said it once, he said it twenty times, for more than twenty sheets were torn up and flung upon the floor. Yet far away in some unawakened corner of his mind, he wished he had the cause to curse and swear over a great enterprise.

Once Emily had put her head round the corner of the door, when Mr. Nibbs in an undertone had implored her to go away.

"What's the matter with my bein' here?" she had asked, and being told by Dicky that there was no good on earth she could do except to shut the door and clear out, in a tone of voice, moreover, that asked for no reply, nor expected it, she did quietly as she was bid and left the room.

It was a great struggle to win before the light should be gone. With coats off, with hands and faces smeared with ink, speaking only when the occasion demanded, one print after another was tried, one print after another passed through the various stages until calamity overtook it.

It came to the time when Mr. Nibbs almost trembled as, after each printing, he looked over Dicky's shoulder to see what progress had been made. Indeed, it was like the building of a house of cards, when they held their breath lest the whole structure should tumble to the ground. But over and over again the building of all their hopes tottered and fell. In perfection it would reach the last story, the last print in the last colour would be all that had to be made. Yet nothing but that complete perfection,



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the full realisation of the picture that was in his mind, would satisfy Dicky.

With a muttered groan, Mr. Nibbs watched copies being flung aside, which seemed good enough to him, yet once having dared to suggest that they would do, he never dared again.

At last from the silent machine which had defied all their efforts until then, Dicky had pulled out a print at the sight of which his heart beat in all the glory of success.

"I've got it!" he cried—"My Gòd! I've got it!" and looked long and eagerly at every inch of it with eyes that saw for the first time the perfect features of this child of his brain. That thought, indeed, must have recurred to him again, for turning round he said seriously—

"It's like a woman having a child—all this business—when you get to the printing—it's like the day the child is born—one moment nothing—a blank piece of paper—and then this—this thing—finished—alive—exactly what I knew it would be like."

He laid it down on the table with a big breath of relief, then suddenly seizing the fat little print-seller by the waist, proceeded to dance round the room with him. To the sound of her husband's breathless exclamations and the noise from the room beyond, Emily left the counter in the shop and opened the door. At the sight of her, Dicky left his partner and seized her about the waist instead.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he yelled as he danced;



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then stopped as suddenly, and, catching up the print, held it up in the light for both of them to see.

"Is that what it's all about?" said Emily as callously as her want of breath would permit her.

"That's it," said Dicky. "My God! isn't it enough? Do you think you're going to beat that in a hurry? Look at the green of that grass getting up at you through the mist! Look at the shoes of that man—wet through!"

"You can't see 'is shoes—'is feet's 'idden," said Emily.

"No!" exclaimed Dicky, "but you live with that for a day or two, and you'll see his shoes quick enough. You'll be able to count how many mushrooms they've got in their baskets if you live with it long enough."

The conceit of achievement needs the heart of a child to carry it shoulder high. Even with his slender powers of appreciation, Mr. Nibbs knew that the work was fine. There seemed no conceit to him in all that Dicky said. He knew in this wood-engraving which was being held before them by those shaking hands, that a picture greater than he had ever seen had reached its accomplishment.

"It's a bloomin' miracle to me," he continued to say, and mostly to himself. "It's a bloomin' miracle to me—after Dürer and those men—it's a bloomin' miracle to me!"



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CHAPTER XV

TWENTY perfect printings of the "Mushroom Gatherers" were made, the complete edition to be sold by Rheinhardt and Guernani at their premises in Bond Street.

When in a week's time these were finished, Dicky took one of his chisels and, in the presence of Mr. Nibbs, scored the final mark of completion across the faces of the five blocks of wood.

"There's an end of that," said he; and, with a deep sigh, he handed them all over to Mr. Nibbs. "You can keep 'em. Don't let 'em get lost. But I don't want to see 'em again—not now, at any rate."

With an air of reverence, in accord with the inevitable sentiment of his nature, the little print-seller took them away.

"I don't know 'ow you can 'ave the face to do it," said he, "not after all the work you've put into it. I'm damned if I could! Why, cuttin' them blocks, 'ow long did it take yer?"

"Two months—nearly two. I'll get quicker at it than that, though. Oh, I'm not sorry! There are just twenty of 'em—that's all—just twenty. No one can have any more than that, and I've got two. They let me choose any two I liked, and I've got the best of the lot."

"You're takin' both of 'em back to the country, I suppose?" said Mr Nibbs tentatively.

It was never that he hoped to be given one. He



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knew the intrinsic and the commercial value of them too well. But he had thought, he had wondered, he had meant to say that if he might, if it were possible for him to be allowed to do so, he would buy one. Ten guineas was more than he had ever paid for a picture in his life; but having once bought Richard Furlong's at two guineas it was no less his desire to buy them still, however high their price had risen.

He never allowed himself to think what Emily would say, supposing he were permitted to purchase one. A price like that for a picture might send her into hysterics. She had a poor idea of pictures, on the whole, had Emily, and believed in paying for them in proportion to their size.

For ten guineas, he knew, she would expect a portrait, life-size head and shoulders. And then she would call it dear. But this coloured wood-engraving—well—he was not going to allow himself to think what she would say.

But there they were, both going away out of the shop. This was the only chance he would have of buying one. Rheinhardt and Guernani would never sell their wares to him, a struggling picture-framer in the Waterloo Bridge Road. He knew the Bond Street dealer, as all men in a small way know those who are well set in the broader thoroughfares of life. He knew them better than they knew themselves.

When Dicky began to pack them up in their protection of cardboard wrapping, his eyes dwelt longingly at those two prints—the best of the lot.



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"You're takin' both of 'em back," he said again, and just as tentatively as before.

Dicky looked down at the round face of the little print-seller which could express nothing but its beaming good-humour. There was something in his voice, however, in which Dicky detected the note of disappointment. Then, with a sudden light illuminating his mind, he pulled out one of the two prints from its wrappings.

"Not both of them," said he—"that's yours"; and he thrust it into the hands of Mr. Nibbs as though he hoped it would be taken away and hidden from his sight as soon as possible.

Mr. Nibbs' lips fell open as he felt the touch of his fingers on the print that was his.

"I 'aven't got the ten guineas just now," said he, his voice half tremulous in excitement, the thought of Emily stinging him to a sense of apprehension.

Dicky looked down at him with a smile.

"I can pay it in a week or two," Mr. Nibbs went on quickly, "you can take my word for that; but, look 'ere—" He took hold of Dicky's arm, whispering, as though the very walls were spying on Emily's behalf—"For God's sake don't tell the Missis—you know what I mean. She ain't got any fancy for Bond Street prices. Well—she don't understand 'em—that's what it comes to. I could pay yer now—to-day—d'yer see, but I want to do it on the quiet. All you've got to say is yer don't mind waitin', because I wouldn't miss this chance, mind yer——"

And then Dicky let his laughter go.

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"I said it was yours," said he; "don't make an ass of yourself. It's yours. Take it away."

The fingers of the little print-seller rubbed up and down against the surface of the paper. He spread it out before him and looked at it; then looked up again at Dicky.

"Mine?" said he.

Dicky reminded him of that day when first he had come into the shop of the Waterloo Picture Framing Company.

"Without a bob in the world," said he, "and you gave me two quid for a rotten picture of the bridge. I owed that much to Constance then—do you think I've forgotten that. Go on—take your print. It's yours."

Mr. Nibbs took off his horn spectacles and wiped them, the better to see the thing that was his own.

"A genuine Richard Furlong," he said to himself. Having nothing further then to say than that, he put out his hand.

CHAPTER XVI

THE day that Dicky set off for London to his printing was regarded with some misgiving by Mrs. Flint. It was only to be expected that Mr. Furlong would make the hay of opportunity while the sun of Dicky's absence was in the heavens.

She guessed at that, and, naturally enough, she feared it not a little. Her position in that house-



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hold, indeed, was a difficult one, for, with Dicky's departure, deprived of that pleasant duty of calling him in the morning, finding the empty space in her mind left by the loss of even the briefest of their conversations, she learnt only too quickly the essential need of him to her.

Every morning of that week she went up to his studio bedroom, tidied and dusted the various things with her own hands, nor permitted Lizzie to perform any of the duties there which, by all accounts, should have been hers to do.

It cannot be supposed that this helped her to forget, but rather urged remembrance to her mind. For so it seems a woman will often nurse the passion that is in her heart, cherishing in her secret breast the things that hurt her most.

Believing that she had outlived the more foolish passion of Romance contemplating an unimpassioned marriage of affection with Mr. Furlong, Mrs. Flint was the more bewildered, the more possessed, by these disturbing influences.

Her sole desire in those few days that Dicky was away was concentrated in every effort to distract Mr. Furlong's mind from any thought of her. She knew the danger of Dicky's absence; realising only too well the greater freedom the father would feel away from the critical eyes of his son.

Moreover, there lay the uncomfortable sensation in her conscience that in some degree—known only to the code of honour of a woman—she had pledged herself to the affections of Mr. Furlong.

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No words had passed between them; no compact whatsoever had been made. Yet in the mere fact of the position of confidence which she had filled for the last year or more, she felt that she had given the miller reason to take for granted her complaisance.

To say that this constituted a sense of duty in her heart is to make the business clear only to creatures of her sex. The legal, even the unwritten word of honour, could scarcely be found in this subtle attitude of her mind. Yet finding matter for honour there, she did what many another woman would have done. With every cunning her needs suggested to her thoughts, she set out to distract him from his Romantic contemplation of herself.

The picture of Christina which she, indeed, had caused to be removed, was brought back into the sitting-room and hung in its old place.

This was on the second day, and Mr. Furlong was quick to notice it.

"I thought you said it was old-fashioned," said he, and hesitated long before even he said that. He did not like speaking of Christina to Mrs. Flint. Indeed, in those days he did his utmost to forget her. And this remembrance, forced upon him thus, was greatly distressing to his mind.

"I remember, I did say it was old-fashioned," she replied, with a steady glance at him, "but I've thought since it was no place of mine to say so. Of course, it has associations for you which I never took into consideration when I said that. I thought you'd *like* it back."



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Her look was steadier than his, for women are ever at advantage when there is acting to be done. He would have had her see that those associations meant but little to him now; that though he could not say as much in the presence of that picture, yet she could see it, if she wished, in the meaning of his eyes.

Now had she seen it, surely he thought her eyes would have fallen before his. Yet here she proved herself better at the game than he. Her glance outlasted his. Conscious of some defeat, though scarcely knowing where it lay, he turned his eyes to the window.

Then the thought suddenly occurring to him, that he could trace the hands of Dicky in all this, he faced her once more. The instinct in him, indeed, was true enough, but suspicion carried his mind too far. He conceived Dicky, for reasons of his own, actually requesting that the portrait should be replaced. The words had come to his lips and were spoken, before he realised the folly of what he had said.

With a coldness he had never heard in her voice before, Mrs. Flint denied the ill-concealed suggestion.

"Dicky said nothing to me," she replied, "but I know how devoted he was to his mother—well, anyone could see that. He often says he wishes she could see the work he does. Certainly I may have thought that it hurt him not to find it there—if, perhaps, it didn't hurt you."

"I certainly didn't want it to go," said Mr. Fur-



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long and, in the defence of one sentiment, knew that he had been defeated in another.

He had intended that very day to speak to her, to propose, indeed, that they should be married. This conversation made it impossible—for that day at least. With a sigh of relief which he never heard, Mrs. Flint rose from the meal at which they had been sitting, knowing she had gained a respite from the thing she feared.

She may have hoped his intentions would be thwarted, and for some time; that at the end of the week Dicky would return and nothing have been said. But there was a firmness in the determination of Mr. Furlong which she had not taken into her reckoning. Not easily was he dissuaded from the thing upon which his heart was set. As Dicky himself had said of him, he needed but the time to make wise and right the thing which he desired, and if the desire were great enough, such self-conviction would speedily follow.

On the evening before Dicky's return they were sitting together at late tea, Mr. Furlong nervously conscious that the moment had arrived when everything seemed right because he so earnestly desired it, and everything seemed wise because Dicky had not as yet come back. Each night he had prayed upon his knees to his Father in Heaven for guidance, and this being the state of his mind after all these prayers had been said, what could he suppose but that God approved of his choice?

There may have been something in the unusually



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quiet suppression of his manner, bringing moments of suspicion to the mind of Mrs. Flint; but, on the whole, she was unprepared. For those last five days, when every opportunity had offered, he had said nothing. She believed then in her heart that she had won; had effected the purpose of her determination that life should not be a disappointment.

If there are any to blame her for this, it is for want of sympathy in her judgment. For as work is the life of a man, so marriage is the life of a woman, and she must choose as warily, as cunningly, as carefully as he. For to the one man who is forced into the labour that he loathes, a hundred women are drawn by circumstances into a marriage where their heart is absent. Mrs. Flint was only fighting, as every man has fought, for a labour that should be of love, fearing with all her heart the coming of that opportunity it were unwise to lose.

So she may have believed she had kept it from her, and when Mr. Furlong reminded her that Dicky returned next day, her heart rose in a song of gratitude, while her lips just muttered her acquaintance of the fact.

Deceived by that casual acknowledgment, as it was meant he should be, the miller took courage from her seeming indifference.

"Well, there's something I've been wanting to say all the week," said he, "something I wanted to say before he returned. Of course, I'm very glad to have him here; I wouldn't like him to think for a moment that I'm not. But I expect you've found



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that things aren't quite the same as they were since he came."

There was a chill of ice about the heart of Mrs. Flint as she asked in what way they had altered.

"Oh, in a hundred little ways." He tried to speak lightly. Here, he felt, was the moment to make her smile if he could. The situation demanded that it should be lifted with a spirit of cheerfulness, for the moments were dragging. He realised the weight of them as they laboured by. "I always used to find these late teas such jolly meals," he continued. "Dicky seems to me to come down to them wrapped in a blanket—and it's nearly always wet."

He laughed in a pleasant consciousness of his humour, and had there been the necessary one word of truth in it, she might have laughed as well. But she knew it had been Dicky's cheerfulness, Dicky's height of spirit, Dicky's vitality, that had cast the wet blanket upon him. At those meals, as much as anywhere, Mrs. Flint had realised the difference between youth and age.

"Why, Dicky's the most vital person I think I've ever met," she replied. "A wet blanket on his shoulders? With his vitality it wouldn't be there for long. Anyhow, the meals have been very quiet since he's gone."

"Do you miss him, then?" asked Mr. Furlong in sudden apprehension.

She had to throw back her head to make her laugh seem real. And it was easy for a woman to deceive



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Mr. Furlong. He found it real enough. 'A new hope in his mind answered to it.

"Whatever made you think that?" said she, recovering in perfect simulation from her laughter. "He's a boy of twenty-five— isn't he? You forget I'm getting on. I shall be thirty one of these days."

With that new hope which had risen in him, what a child she seemed to him then!

"Would you mind passing me the butter, please," said she, still with that echo of laughter in her voice, but with a bitterness almost more cruel than she could bear in her heart.

He passed the dish and, when her fingers held it, kept his hand upon it too. Their arms were thus stretched out across the table, linking them together, compelling her eyes to meet the ardent glance of his.

"I—I thought perhaps you might have grown to care for the boy," he said in that tone of voice which no woman can mistake.

She knew it was upon her now. The opportunity it were unwise to lose was on the very threshold of her life.

"How Dicky would laugh if he heard you say that!" said she. It was not denying that she cared for him, yet it had the effect she desired. It suggested that denial to his mind. It seems to prove how much greater a thing is love to a woman. Pride will not let her admit it unless it be returned. She would have died rather than that the miller should think she nursed a passion alone.

The butter dish had changed hands by now. He



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had intended to put his proposal to her then, while his eyes held hers, but the moment had passed. Now he was waiting for the moment again, afraid to put food into his mouth lest it should come and find him unprepared to meet it.

At last, deciding that it was easier to make the moment than to find it; with heart beating the blood hotly to his cheeks, he laid down his knife upon the plate.

"Margaret," he said, and, hearing his first use of her Christian name, felt that all had been said in that. The ever-ready tears of his emotion swelled up into his eyes as he looked up at her.

She knew well enough what it meant, yet even then struggled to the last.

"What's the matter?" she exclaimed.

To explain what was the matter as though it were an ailment, distressed and confused him for the moment. He took up the knife again and cut the top off his egg, then, looking up once more, he said simply: "Margaret, I want you to marry me."

The whole room grew cold to her. She had anticipated it for so long, yet that anticipation had robbed none of the terror of it from her mind when it came.

No woman would have volunteered the information that, as in this instance, she loved another man who had spoken no word of love to her. Mrs. Flint tried for an instant to say it, but the whole pride and honour of her sex forbade it.

She just looked across the table at Mr. Furlong,



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conscious of sympathy, as of a thing far away, for the distress of emotion in his mind, and, shaking her head, she replied: "Why couldn't things have gone on as they were?"

The wretched man felt the inevitable stillness in his heart.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Can't you—won't you marry me?"

For a moment she covered her eyes with her hand, in that moment gathering strength for the only course she knew she could adopt.

"One can't marry—I couldn't without love." She took her hand away and looked at him. "You see, I've known once—only for three months—what love is. I've been intensely happy here, because I've felt all respect and friendship—if I may say that—for you. But I don't feel love. Now this, of course, ends it all. I—I must go. All in this little moment the whole position has become impossible."

"Do you mean this?" he asked thickly.

"Yes—I do—I mean it."

"But you can't go," said he, "you mustn't go." He was frightened, and the fear was in his voice. He saw before him the lonely days again—the days when Christina was dead and Anne had gone to be married. "If I'd thought," he went on, "if I'd thought that my asking you that would drive you away, I should never have said a word of it."

"Never have said a word?" she looked up at him, wondering.

"No—you've been so much to me here, that I



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couldn't lose you now. I am not a young man, you know. I couldn't bear with loneliness as a young man could. I've no friends to make. You've been the only friend I've needed."

"Then it isn't that you love me?" she asked, "it is that you want companionship."

"Yes—I do love you," he answered quickly.

"Ah!—but you would not have told me if you had thought it would drive me away."

"No—no—I shouldn't have told you. I would sooner that things remained as they were than that."

She could not restrain the lifting hope in her heart. This was only the love of a man who knew no more of youth. He needed companionship. She knew she could give him that. It comes into every woman's life, the moment when she must be cruel. There was not such cruelty in this as her conscience would forever be pricked by it. He needed companionship more than love, and indeed she could give him that.

When he rose from the table and came round to her side, all fear of the moment in her was gone.

"Don't go," he whispered. "I won't say anything of this again. Perhaps I was a fool to hope that your youth and my years could ever meet except as they have met till now."

"My youth!" said she bitterly—Dicky did not think her so young!—"It's just a matter of comparison, I suppose. I shall be thirty soon—one of these days."



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CHAPTER XVII

THE intense interest of printing his wood-engraving had occupied all Dicky's thoughts to the exclusion of every other consideration. It was only when he was nearing Pershore in the train once more that the situation, as he had left it at the Mill, came back in all its humour, all its subtlety, yet one must suppose with but half its meaning to his mind.

Associating Mrs. Flint with his father as circumstances and a whole combination of ideas had inclined him to do, he was as yet unable to realise her youth. To think of a woman as a possible mate for one's father and at the same time to hear such objections as Mr. Furlong had raised before Dicky went to London, needs some elasticity of mind to approach perfect comprehension. Dicky had put it down to the unreasonable jealousy of a man in love, and in so far as that was right enough. But that it was not unreasonable, that there was a human and legitimate cause for the jealousy, had not clearly occurred to him.

All the way back in the train he let his mind wonder what had happened in his absence. For he, too, had realised that with his departure a greater sense of freedom must make itself apparent to Mr. Furlong. Most likely in those seven days he had found opportunity to make his proposal of marriage. And if that had happened, then Mrs. Flint had ac-



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cepted him. But had he told her, as he had suggested he would, that Mrs. Flint must not call him in the morning? Had he been so much of a fool as to expose the smallness of his mind in such a way as that?

The next morning would show him quickly enough. So far as his father was concerned, he had no intention to refer to the subject again. For what sense of reason had there been in his objection? He could see none, because his mind had been tricked by a subtle deception of circumstance. Mrs. Flint had been married before; she was a woman approaching thirty, an age which to him, then at twenty-five, seemed old for her sex; but most of all in this hallucination of his mind was the influence of the fact that his father, in his sixty-second year, had set his heart upon her, and she, indeed, had confessed her willingness that it should be so.

With such a combination of impressions it is no matter for surprise that Dicky did not consciously regard Mrs. Flint in the light his father had suggested. But the suggestion was still there, a seed planted deep, awaiting only the fertilisation of that need of a woman in his life.

There was all the interest of showing the copy of his wood-block to distract his thoughts from this channel on that evening when he returned. They had seen it, both his father and Mrs. Flint, in that meaningless form—the five wooden blocks, carved and gutted and scraped, whose relation to the finished print none but he could possibly have understood.



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He walked the journey back from Pershore to the Mill, and, the nearer he reached Eckington, the more his thoughts centred on his work, combined with that eagerness to tell them of his success, to show them the result of the long hours of his labour.

Mrs. Flint opened the door to his knocking, for a moment standing there in the doorway with heart thumping in her breast. He took it for surprise, all that expression in her face and, in a boyish enthusiasm, dropped his picture and took both her hands in his to wring a welcome from her. The pleasure of it all was as deep as pain to her. She knew by this welcome he had no thought of her.

"Where's your luggage?" she asked, steadying herself with the first commonplace question that rose to her mind.

"Left that at the station," said he. "Carrier bringing it to-morrow."

"Then what's this?"

She picked up his parcel.

"My print—the 'Mushroom Gatherers'—Come on into the dining-room—you want to see it, don't you? They've taken it—Rheinhardt and Guernani. A hundred pounds for twenty prints—two of which I get for myself. Ten guineas a piece they sell 'em for in Bond Street. I've had two—that's nearly a hundred and twenty pounds."

He named that sum in a boastfulness of pride, yet it meant nothing to him beyond the appreciation for which it stood. That is the real meaning of money to an artist, for no appreciation is so genuine as this.



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"Are you going to sell both your prints?" she asked.

"No—rather not! I've given one away."

"To whom?" she inquired quickly.

"Oh—Mr. Nibbs—the little print-seller I told you about. He was the first to sell anything I did. Lord! I'm not going to sell 'em! Why—I must have one—damn it, I did it!"

She laughed as she watched his face, thinking of the wet blanket Mr. Furlong had described him to be. Why, in these first five minutes he had returned, the blood was warmer in her veins. All life was tingling in her again. It was this he brought with him. She could scarcely believe that once she had contemplated with equanimity being the mistress of Trafford Mill. For this was youth in her that Dicky brought to life by the mere vitality of his presence. He made her feel all the burning purpose of body and soul, and were it to be no more than that, she knew she would be grateful.

At the sound of Dicky's voice, a sound that chilled him to the remembrance of his age, as it had warmed Mrs. Flint to the knowledge of her youth, Mr. Furlong came in from another room.

In his eagerness to show them his picture, Dicky did not notice the manner of restraint with which his father greeted him.

"I shall know," he had said to himself in the train, "I shall know the moment I see him whether he has proposed to her or not." Yet in that moment of excitement, forgot to look.



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For there was the picture he had created from those five pieces of wood; there was the thing he had made alive out of the dead material that had been to his hand. He held it out in the light, and in silence they came to look at it.

Every attitude of his body, every expression of his face, declared to them that he knew it was good—the moment of that first creation which is forever living again in every man who puts his hand to the lathe of labour in the desire to make some new thing. For the life of every man who works is, in little, as are the ages of God. Six moments he must labour and for one moment rest; that moment when he looks at the work he has done and finds it good or bad.

Here was Dicky finding good the work he had done, and not the deepest emotion of his father or the greatest passion of Mrs. Flint could distract his mind then.

"Is that what you painted while you were away?" asked Mr. Furlong presently.

"No—what I printed," said Dicky; "that's printer's ink—not paint."

The miller frowned.

"But I don't understand," said he. "What did you print it from?"

Mrs. Flint caught the look in Dicky's eyes and answered quickly before his impatience had replied.

"No—no—don't you remember those blocks of wood he had upstairs in his bedroom. It's printed from those. Isn't that right, Dicky?"

He agreed and thanked her from his eyes.



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"Then this is your revolution in wood-engraving?" Mr. Furlong continued.

"Oh—I don't know if it's a revolution—that's only my talk. One must describe it some way or other. I'd swear just that sort of thing has never been done before. Colour in wood-engravings—yes—of course—flat, plain colour, but not this. Don't you see, I'm going for the something that's in between you and the thing you see."

"Quite so—quite so," said Mr. Furlong; and, believing that he was helping Dicky to explain himself, he added, "you mean atmosphere."

"Oh—atmosphere—yes—that's what everyone calls it. But I mean more than that."

"You mean the impression you give in this, for instance, that there's something between you and those people"—he peered nearer to the picture—"they are people, aren't they? Yes—those two women and the man—the something that I can see quite plainly if I stand a little way away—the something between me and them."

"Well—that's mist," said Dicky, "the mist you get in the meadows now—at this time of the year. Yes—that's atmosphere."

"I certainly don't know what else you would call it," replied Mr. Furlong. He said it triumphantly. His choice of word was right. This was only Dicky's character, not liking to have the thing explained for him. And then, too, Mrs. Flint was there, silent but listening to all they said. He was striving to prove to her, far more than to Dicky, that he knew what



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he was talking about. He was aware he was no artist, and accompanying that knowledge, as it often does, he believed he was something of a critic.

"Yes—atmosphere's the word," he repeated. "Don't grumble at it."

And his smile, as he looked at Mrs. Flint across Dicky's shoulder, told her, if she had cared to read it, that this was the way of the young—they disliked it to be shown that they did not know everything.

"I'm not grumbling," said Dicky, who had not seen his father's smile because his eyes had never left his picture. "Only atmosphere's not what I mean—everyone says atmosphere. Every artist talks about it, and shows it you in his picture with a sweep of the flat of his thumb. But that's not what I mean. When I say I'm going for the something that's between you and the thing you see, I mean the something that comes out of you to meet the something that comes out of the thing you see. You and I stand here, and there's something more than atmosphere between us—there's something more than atmosphere between Mrs. Flint and me. I'm trying to get hold of that."

Mrs. Flint drew her breath. If for one instant she had thought that Mr. Furlong's mind was keeping pace with that of his son's, she thought so not one moment longer. There was indeed something between herself and him. Standing close to him then, she felt it like some tangible current of vital electricity. It was that, she knew he meant, however unconscious he might be of what it was.

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"Do you think you've got it in this?" she asked, her eyes directing his back to the picture.

"Oh—Lord! that's for you to say," said he. "Do you feel anything else between those people and yourself?" he asked, "something more than the mist."

She looked back into his eyes that were turned expectantly to her.

"Yes."

"What?—What do you feel?"

She would have given crowns and kingdoms for the power of expression then. It was a moment, and if only in that moment his mind and hers could meet, he might realise a need of her in answer to her overwhelming need of him.

She struggled with the words on her tongue and saw the moment pass. It had been a question needing impulse, instinct, and all the sudden motions of the mind to answer it. Once in a choice of words she had let the impulse go, the moment had gone with it. She spoke of sympathy for those two women, searching for what they could not find; of impatience at the man's success. But it was not what she meant. By the disappointment in his eyes, she knew she had failed to meet her mind with his.

"Yes," said he, "yes—I suppose I know what you mean," and wrapped up the picture in its paper once more.

"Well now, Dicky," said his father, "I'm sure all this is very interesting, but tea'll be ready in a minute. Hadn't you better go upstairs and wash your hands?"

At which Dicky, from sheer disappointment and



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because of that ludicrous conclusion to his thoughts, broke into a laugh.

"What's the joke?" asked the miller.

"Nothing," said Dicky, "only the sudden remembrance of old times. A man and his father never grow up." He was still laughing as he reached the door.

"Shall I show my nails to Mrs. Flint when I come down?" said he.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHILE Dicky was lying awake early the next morning in the bed which one week's absence had made strange to him again, Mrs. Flint was dressing herself in preparation for calling him. He had not said he had wanted to be called. She had not cared to ask him before Mr. Furlong. This she was doing on her own account, allowing herself no moment in her mind to reason why it was, simply doing it in that blind and instinctive desire by which women are led through life to their joy or to their sorrow.

She had slept badly that night. Her cheeks were pale with the need of rest when first she rose and looked at herself in the mirror. This thought pursued her continually as she dressed. Again and again she looked in the glass as she passed, sometimes rubbing her cheeks with her hands, and for the moment content with the glow of colour it brought.

But all this time, in the recesses of her mind, was

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the thought of the little tube of lip-salve, lying away in the back of the drawer of her dressing-table.

For a long while she would not admit the presence of that thought to her actual consciousness. For a long while she battled with it, shrinking intuitively from the dressing-table where it lay. But the moment came when her hair must be dressed and she must sit before the mirror. Yet even then she tried to lose the thought in the careful, studied carelessness with which she did her hair.

Here she was indeed being a woman in all the purpose of her soul. Nature must find the excuse for her, for Nature made her so. For here was a woman still young, alive in all the instincts of her sex, a mother who might be as Nature meant her to be, a creature full of desire to love and to be loved; such a creature in such a moment as in this country it would seem we must not speak of.

Yet I must speak of Mrs. Flint because, whatever may have been her effect upon Dicky's passions, the greatness of her own could have done nothing but lift his spirit one rung—no less—the higher in the ascent he was to make.

By the time her hair was done, the secret of that charm of youth could keep itself from her no longer. To herself she admitted remembrance of where it lay; her hand had opened the dressing-table drawer, her fingers had found the little tube and, before she could resist again, it was lying in the daylight in her hand.

But not to use! No—not to use—only to read upon the label that wrapped it round, if really it were



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sold, as the chemist had said, to bring that longed-for colour to pale lips such as hers.

"Imparts a healthy colour to the lips"; indeed, that she read, but only as a last remark upon the qualities it proclaimed. She rubbed it again, as she had done before, upon her hand, and the colour was so slight. Had her lips really been sore and she had used it, who but herself would have known? She applied it to her lips to prove it would be so.

Then it was done! Then why not do it well? With fingers quickened by the thought, she did it all and hid it in the drawer again. Instinctively, in her knowledge of what stings the blood in man, she looked again in the mirror.

"At any rate, I wouldn't put it on my cheeks," said she aloud, for the face that was reflected back into her eyes was paler still by contrast with the warmer colour of her lips, and it was instinct bid her leave it so. He would not like a painted thing, she thought beneath the words she said. And then again said out aloud: "Well—at least I should never put it on my cheeks."

CHAPTER XIX

DURING all that time, in which Dicky lay awake, listening for the sounds of Mrs. Flint's footsteps upon the stairs, he speculated upon what had happened during that week of his absence.

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The minutes went by until he came at last to believe that his father must have spoken to her upon the doubtful wisdom of her coming to his room. Yet could it be possible that he had warned her? Then warned her of what? She was not a child in her 'teens, liable to all the sudden follies of romance. She was a woman who had met life; who had met sorrow; whose emotions surely had been matured in the passage of time.

Why should he have been forced into this thinking of her youth when, if there had been any consideration in his mind before, it had been only of her age? He tried as he lay there to bring her face to his memory; to recall her features one by one. Yet the vision he drew to his mind was but dim and indistinct.

At last, putting the thoughts away from him, he sat up in the bed, his knees to his chin, thinking of the work that lay before him to be done. It was in the midst of this contemplation, like a sound with its insistent breaking-in upon a dream, that he heard the creaking of the stairs and the footsteps of someone approaching. Instinctively he held his breath as his eyes fastened on the door. It was Lizzie. He made sure that it was Lizzie come to call him. A sense of anger that it should be so was hot in his blood.

Then the door opened and there stood Mrs. Flint with his jug of hot water.

His eyes were ready to her face, searching it in the new light in which his father unthinkingly had brought his mind to regard her. And as they faced each other then, there crept the disquieting knowledge



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into his heart that his father had been right. So he gazed at her and, with the fear of discovery sickening in her heart, she stared back at him.

"What is it, Dicky?" she asked. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter," said he—but could not take his eyes away.

"Then why do you look at me like that?"

"Like what?"

"As if—as if there were something—the matter with *me*."

"Did I?" he replied. "I didn't mean to. I wasn't thinking that." Then he forced himself to look away. But when she moved across the room, taking his hot water to the washhandstand, his eyes followed her, drawn beyond his will in the sudden amazement that had taken hold upon his thoughts.

For a few moments she stood at the window, looking out down the winding stretches of the Avon, yet with all her vision turned within. Had he guessed? Even in that short while it seemed he must have seen, realising the purpose of what she had done. Her hand went quickly to her mouth and, with a feverish movement, she rubbed her lips. With a swift glance downwards, she could see the smudge of red that now was staining her fingers.

And in all this while of silence, but scarcely conscious of what it meant, Dicky was watching her from the bed.

"But something is the matter," said he at last. "What is it?"

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Still she did not turn, but asked him what he meant, or imagined it could be.

"Well—I can feel it," said he; "something's gone wrong somewhere. Has the pater said anything to you?"

For at that instant had come the sudden suspicion that, after all, his father might have spoken; that with the same suggestions to her mind she might have defied his will and of her own determination come there to his room to call him.

"Said what?" she asked. And then she turned. "What should he say?"

"What he's already said to me."

"What was that?"

It was to be said now; though doubtless had he known the furnace he was stirring into flame, he might have paused, at least, or never the words go past his lips.

"He said he didn't think it quite right that you should come and call me in the morning."

It was like a blow to her. The hot blood burnt and smarted in her cheeks as though the blow had fallen there. For some moments she stood before him, her breath coming quickly between her lips, her whole body quivering with the shame and pain of it. For it was true; it was not right, it was all folly, it was nothing that it should have been, and there was the sting which made the bitterness of that blow. It was telling her to her face why she had put that adornment of colour on her lips; it was accusing her, as though before a multitude, of all those impulses



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which, only when she is driven to bay, will a woman ever admit.

Looking at her then, as she stood by the window, Dicky could not believe this was the same Mrs. Flint, the practical, capable woman whose equanimity it had seemed no crisis could disturb. The depth of that crisis even then he did not fully understand, but sat up in the bed in wonder watching her.

"When did he say that?" she asked in a breath which emotion hurried from her lips.

"Before I went away—the day before. I told him if he thought it ought to be stopped, he must speak to you. It wasn't really anything to do with me. Hasn't he spoken to you?"

"No."

"Not about anything at all while I've been away?"

She did not answer, but her eyes were steady in a passionate glance on his. She could not answer, knowing that in her very silence the truth was being told. And indeed Dicky was awakening to knowledge now. In a confusion of thoughts, knowing not which way in his mind to turn, he pressed her further to reveal all that had happened in his absence.

"He's asked you to marry him—hasn't he?" he said, to which the silent inclination of her head gave all the answer he required.

"Well—and you've accepted. You said you would. Don't you remember we talked about it, that day going to Bredon? You said you would."

In some sort of fear he made this reiteration. She said she would. He was trying in his confusion



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to keep her to her word. For looking at her eyes, there grew the apprehension that he could not trust her then, and in his heart the apprehension lay he could not trust himself. Surely she must have kept her word, when all this fear of both himself and her was groundless.

"Why don't you answer?" said he. "You're going to marry him—aren't you? Didn't you say you would?"

One moment longer her eyes were on his eyes, the next she had tumbled upon her knees, bending her face in hiding in the bedclothes by his side. He sat there, not moving, listening to the sobbing of her voice as she confessed her love for him. Then suddenly all apprehension of himself was gone. A strange, dispassionate pity chilled his blood, while every word she uttered froze in him, leaving nothing but the compassion that he felt.

When she looked up, her cheeks were wet with the passage of her tears, her lips were quivering, and all the beauty she had sought to win him with was gone. Only that which was beautiful in her love remained, and knowing this, as every woman must who comes to tears, she struggled on with voice half broken by her sobbing, telling him of this love she had no power to put away.

It was the confession of an almost broken heart, for in the first moment as she clutched his hand, hiding it in her own against her lips to help her in the things she said, she had known from the cold lifelessness of the fingers in her own that all her passion



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was in vain. Yet still she had stumbled on, covering his unresponsive hand with her kisses, taking no heed of his half-muttered words of gentlest restraint.

And then at last, when the fierce flame of her emotion had been spent, when the salt of her tears was drying on her lips and Dicky's restraining voice had set its chill upon her heart, she looked up to his face.

"I've done a terrible thing, Dicky," she whispered. "What have I done?"

It was then his fingers closed about her hand, when sympathy was all that he could give and all that she could ask.

"Has it been my fault?" he whispered back. "I hope to God it hasn't."

No—she would have none of that. The fault had been hers and hers alone. The interest he had shown to tell her of his work; the times that he had seemed to need but her companionship, and then this thwarted Romance of all her life. She was not the practical, capable thing that she appeared.

"No woman is!" she cried, and beat her hand upon the bed. "It's drilled into all of us to smother the emotions that we've got. From childhood they teach us that. But I swear to God no woman could have kept within herself the love I've got for you. Oh! my dear—oh! my dear. Surely you knew—couldn't you have guessed?"

He begged her in pity for himself to speak of it no more, when in return she swore that all the joy

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left in her life was to say she loved him till her breath was gone.

"Surely," she went on, "when I asked you to let me take your child—you knew?"

He shook his head, but it was all beginning to dawn upon him now.

"Can't I have the child?" she whispered. "He's yours—he's your child—let me have something of yours"—so telling him the sacred secret of a woman's heart, that she had chosen him for father of her flesh and blood.

Like a swift vision there passed before his eyes those thoughts his mind had taken but a week before. It needed love to make him father to the child of her body, yet he could not answer to that love of hers. But in her love of him, unknowingly to both, she was creating the children of his brain who, in the years to come, would find their birth in the work he had to do.

"I can't take him away from Mrs. Baldwin," he said gently. "I saw him when I was in London. She lives for him and nothing else. I couldn't take him away from her. She thought all the world of Constance. Now she thinks all the world of him. For God's sake don't ask me again!—it seems so cruel to refuse—but it would be crueller still if I said I would. My dear—don't ask me."

She bent her head, the practical, the capable woman in her, bowing to the inevitable. The moments passed with her face hidden from his eyes, those moments of her deepest agony, too sacred even for



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him to see. But when she rose to her feet, the mark of them was there, plain for him to behold. For in those moments, resignation had settled in her face. The tragedy of women was in her eyes. All she had thrown upon the hazard of the die, and all had been lost to her. The full years of disappointment, with their eternal harvest of regret, lay stretched before her, and down the uninterrupted avenue of those years, her eyes were gazing as she stood in the light of the window before Dicky then.

With but the faintest instinct of observation in his mind, this was a moment when a man might learn much of the meaning of a woman's life. And Dicky was not slow to observe. The tragedy there was plain enough and brought with it to him an understanding of women which nothing in his life ever destroyed. Indeed, this understanding of her tragedy helped him to the realisation of his own. For it is the tragedy of women when the Romance of love is gone from them, as it is the tragedy of men when their work is done.

Looking at her as she stood there then, in just those few moments when she was gathering together the threads of her courage, Dicky was caught into admiration. So he hoped he might face the tragedy of life when it came to him; and so indeed he did.

For a long while, without movement and in the stillness of her heart, she looked out through the window, where the soft grey rain-clouds were racing, menacing and low across the sky. It was a fit day for her misery, she thought. Hope had never been



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born on such a day as that; on such a day hope well might die, and, as she watched the cold waters of the Avon rushing in their blackness to the weir, she knew her hope was dead.

She turned at last to Dicky and sat down on the bed.

"Dicky," she said, "I don't know what you think about it all, and I'm not going to worry you by asking you. You've given me your answer, and I'm not going to pester you to change it. You needn't be afraid of that." She tried to smile, then took his hand again and brought it quickly to her lips to hide the nearness of that smile to tears.

"But don't ask me anything more about your father," she went on. "He's content that I don't marry him, so long as I stay on here; and I'm content to stay on here, so long as I can look after you, so long as I can see you going on with your work and you'll talk to me about it as you have done up to now. Your father and I, we've got to be content with the little we can get. That's what it comes to. My feelings got the better of me just now. That's what it might have been. There was a moment when really I didn't know what I was doing. Perhaps I didn't mean half what I said."

She brought her lips to smile once more, knowing that she could say every word of it again to the simple pressure of his hand or the merest invitation of his eyes.

"But what would you do," said he, "if I were not here?"

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A look of fear leapt up into her eyes. He could see her fingers tighten on the coverlet of the bed.

"Why do you say—not here?" she asked.

"Because do you think I can possibly stay? You're not going to forget, and I'm not going to forget; I know it's no good telling you I'm not worth caring for like this. That doesn't help—it wouldn't help any woman or any man, for that matter. Besides—can't you see that it's likely to hurt me as much as it is to hurt you?"

"Why?"

She looked up at him with opened eyes and the parted lips of astonishment.

"Why should it hurt you?"

"Well—it's—it's not so long since Constance died. Do you think I've forgotten her? All the things you've just been saying—are the very things she said to me. Every word you said was like a surgeon's knife ripping up old wounds. Every time I see you now will probe those wounds afresh—and for both of us. Not for me alone. I'm not only thinking of myself, though I shouldn't be so much unlike a man if I were. My dear—don't you see it's much better for both of us that I should go?"

"And never come back again?" she whispered.

"Yes—sometimes. Sometimes for week-ends, for holidays in the spring—in the summer. Sometime when the sharper pain of it has become more blunt for both of us. But I must go now—and you know I must."

She bent her eyes steadily on his, and her knowl-



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edge was that it was right. Then leaning to his side and suppressing the emotion in her voice lest he should refuse, she bid him kiss her.

"If you must go," she said.

He leant forward in the bed, when, as his lips touched hers, she fell to trembling, and without another word she hurried from the room.



BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE spirit of youth is the essence of in consequence, the absence of all responsibility. To some men this comes late in life; to some it never comes at all. For youth is not a matter of years, but of attitude of mind alone.

Until for the second time he left the Mill, then close upon the age of twenty-six, it cannot be said that Richard Furlong had ever known the joy of the in consequence of youth. Responsibility in some form or another had always weighed heavily on his mind, for responsibility comes most readily with the promises a man makes to a woman, and from the very age when he should have been enjoying his youth until the death of Constance, Dicky had in some way been bound, in some way had involved himself, when the spirit of in consequence in him was no longer possible.

But now he was free, and the nearer he came to London in his journey from Pershore, the more that sense of freedom grew upon him. To whom was he to turn? Where was he to live? The very in-

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definiteness of life offered a charm for him which he had never experienced before.

For his first thought after the death of Constance had been to turn to someone. This had taken him home to the Mill once more, where even the welcome of his father and the shelter of that roof which not so many years before had closed its doors upon him seemed preferable to the then aching solitude of those surroundings where he and Constance had walked side by side.

But yet again the shelter of that roof had become impossible. Its doors had closed upon him once more. He was thrust out into the freedom of the world. It was the prospect of this freedom now which filled him with the great expectations of adventure.

In the train up to London he sat, all the time dreaming visions of a studio of his own, where he must cook his own meals, make his own bed, live, in fact, that life of untrammelled independence, obedient only to the demands and conditions of his work.

But studios he soon found were more expensive than he thought, for at that time, I should not be far wrong if I said that two hundred pounds a year was the limit of his makings.

After some weeks, however, one was secured at last. With the occasional assistance of Mr. Nibbs, hunting London high and low, he found an attic studio in a house in Ridinghouse Street, behind Queen's Hall. This, the one room and no more, ap-



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proached from the floor below by a little staircase of its own which brought you straight up into the studio, he rented for sixty pounds a year.

One afternoon they brought his printing press there from the Waterloo Bridge Road. Mr. Nibbs himself helped him to set it up, helped him hang his few pictures on the walls. This is no more than saying that Mr. Nibbs carried the hammer and the nails, while Dicky decided where the pictures were to go.

Across one end of the studio a curtain was hung upon a bare iron rod, and behind this a bed and washhandstand were placed, the only apology for a bedroom that was possible.

When everything was finished, with the two candles stuck by their grease upon the top of the empty stove—the necessary ingredient of coal having been forgotten—Mr. Nibbs left Dicky for the night, seated upon the floor in the middle of the vast room, munching bread-and-butter and drinking his cup of tea.

"You'll be all right," called out Mr. Nibbs as he disappeared down the stairs.

"All right?" cried Dicky back. "Why, this is simply ripping!"

Then the door below slammed, and for the first time in his life Dicky was left alone with the absolute freedom of youth.

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CHAPTER II

IT was a bare and a gaunt looking place as Dicky woke up to it the next morning, but a certain pride in it as the weeks went by soon added those little touches which made for him the comfort of his surroundings. It was not long before he decided upon a scheme of decoration, carrying it out with that utter disregard for expense which is the only joy of having little in this world.

He wasted much time, which certainly was money to him, in painting a fresco round the walls—a fresco which I believe has since been destroyed by the over-plastering of paper, doubtless at one-and-sixpence a piece. Orange and white was the scheme of colours he pursued in the decoration of his studio in Ridinghouse Street, and it would seem unrestful enough to any but those who saw it as often as did I.

Certainly the objective in his mind was not for restfulness. The ceaseless vitality in him had no desire for that. Yet there was not the faintest sense of irritation in this arrangement of colour. The cream white of the walls predominated, and above them, near the sloping roof, started his fresco, which he called—the journey of the sun.

Here was his love of the country, forcing its way even into that studio in the heart of London. Over the door, where his journey of the sun began, you saw the dull and livid crimson ball lifting through the grey morning light above the rolling stretches



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of Gloucestershire land. And so it rose and rose until above the model's throne it burnt like a yellow disc with all the heat of day, so, slowly falling again, when over his bed it sank behind a clump of trees in a flame of burning orange.

The various gradations of colour in this, the tones of colour in the curtain about his bed, and the oriental mats upon the floor, it was only in these that the colour of orange took the eye. So that unrestful it could never be said to be; rather those touches of orange on the pale cream-white wall were an unconscious spur to energy, unconsciously, too, expressing that vitality inseparable from the nature of Dicky himself.

I have written this slight description of his surroundings in those days when he found the freedom of his youth in London, because it has always seemed to me that into his dwelling place a man puts the truth of himself, never thinking of the eyes that will judge him by the colour on his walls, but in complete unconsciousness, studying the utmost of his own comfort, his pleasure and his needs.

It was here, in his studio of orange and white, never destined to last in its first severe simplicity, Dicky lived some of the happiest years of his life—happiest in that they were the only years of his freedom, the only years of his youth.

With nails and screws and boards from a neighbouring builder's, he built himself a model's throne, but it was some weeks before ever he could afford to pay a model to sit there. The rug with which



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he had decorated the bare boards had cost five pounds, and that was but one of the needless expenses to which he had gone, getting credit through the trade recommendation of Mr. Nibbs.

He was possessed of the sublime conception of his kind, that tradesmen are content to wait for their money. So long as the intention was earnest in him to pay, he believed that his creditors would be happy to bide their time.

But no sooner did they discover that this Mr. Richard Furlong was an impecunious artist, than they came quickly enough with their bills in their hands. He saw the entire sum which he had made out of the "Mushroom Gatherers" vanishing swiftly before his eyes, until but a meagre matter of ten pounds was all he had left in the world.

Then one morning, while he was seated on the throne eating his breakfast, the studio door opened. A man's head rose above the level of the floor as he mounted the stairs.

"Mr. Richard Furlong?" said the man.

"Good morning," said Dicky.

"It's a little matter of an account," said the man.

"I've just called to know if you'd like to settle it. It's been standing over for some weeks."

In silence Dicky took the envelope presented to him, and in silence looked at the amount. It was something over eight pounds for curtains and draperies—materials he had bought to drape the models he could not afford to employ.

"A little matter you call it?" said he.



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"Well—just over eight pounds."

"I never knew I'd spent so much as that," said Dicky.

"I expect you were given a bill at the time," said the man.

"I expect I was, but I shouldn't think I looked at it. What do you want me to do?"

"Well, my instructions are to ask for a cheque."

"Quite so," said Dicky, "but even if I had a balance at a bank, I couldn't afford to write one—I've only got ten pounds."

The man shrugged his shoulders in addition to the remark that that had nothing to do with him or with his firm.

"No—but it has a devil of a lot to do with me," replied Dicky. "Try taking a picture, and when I pay you later you can let me have the picture back."

Mr. Mossop looked round the walls. As representative of the firm of Gleeson and Mills, he received a salary of two pounds a week and with difficulty made both ends meet in the last house of a suburban terrace. This orange and white was stuff and nonsense to him. He looked about him, thinking pleasantly of his own wall-paper of full-blown roses at home. He inquired if Dicky meant the pictures he saw upon the wall, and when he heard that that was so, he walked slowly round the studio, peering into each one of them.

It was not because he was a judge of pictures that Mr. Mossop pitched upon the "Mushroom Gatherers." The pictures in that last house of the sub-

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urban terrace were all of the order of Monsieur Marco's painting, in heavy gold frames, where they were not photographs of the family or examples of his daughter's efforts in water-colour. More likely it was because the "Mushroom Gatherers" had the most important frame in the room, for before that he stopped, screwing up his eyes and making grimaces to help him in his appreciation of what it meant. Then he turned.

"What's this one?" he asked.

"A coloured wood-engraving—the 'Mushroom Gatherers.' "

"The what—gatherers?"

"Mushroom."

"Don't see no mushrooms," said Mr. Mossop.

"No," said Dicky, "they're in the basket. They're rather difficult to paint, so I thought I'd put 'em in the basket."

"Ha—tricky that!" said Mr. Mossop. There were little matters in his own trade not so much unlike that. His opinion of Dicky as an artist rose at once.

"And how much is that one worth?" he asked.

"It'll be worth fifty pounds one of these days," said Dicky. And that was rating it low, for I have seen a print of the "Mushroom Gatherers" fetch one hundred and thirty pounds at Christy's.

But of course Mr. Mossop knew all about that. Yet, as he tritely remarked, artists had to die first before they realised the true value of their pictures.



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"It's a bit of a drawback, I know," said he; "but that comes of dealing in stuff that people don't want till they know they can't 'ave it. What I want to know is—what's it worth now?"

"Ten pounds," said Dicky.

"You could get that for it?"

"Yes."

"Well—I'll take that then, and my firm won't say no more about the little account."

For this was Mr. Mossop's method of doing business. To accept goods to the value of ten pounds in payment for an account of eight, was based on good, sound business principles, the result of many years of training in the firm of Gleeson and Mills.

"Well—it's a good suggestion," said Dicky, "but I don't think I quite see it. You couldn't have that picture if you offered me fifty pounds for it."

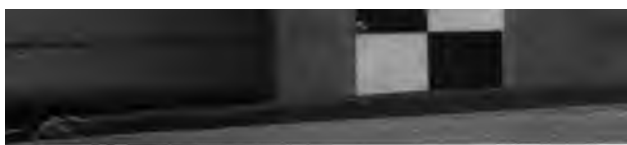
"Why not?"

"It's the only one I've got."

Mr. Mossop's surprise was nothing to his indignation at being thwarted in a good deal. He wanted to know what was the good of talking about selling pictures if they weren't for sale.

"No one did talk about selling," said Dicky. "I said I'd let you have one as security; but if you go on talking that blasted rot, you won't get anything in a minute."

"We'll sue you then," said Mr. Mossop with an unamiable grin. "Instead of me coming here, friendly like and offerin' to arrange matters, you'll 'ave a



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different sort of gentleman with a writ—that's what you'll 'ave."

There was only one reply to that. With the touch of his father in him, Dicky obeyed the instincts of his dignity, bringing forth the eight pounds odd, laying them in silence on the table and then demanding a receipt.

"Haven't got no stamp," said Mr. Mossop, somewhat impressed at the sight of the money ready in gold and silver.

"Then go out and buy one," said Dicky, reversing the position of one who obeys to one who commands.

One pound ten and a few odd shillings remained out of his capital. But in those days, free and without responsibility in that Ridginghouse Street studio, Dicky felt none of the power of that social pressure which brings a man to regard such a situation with terror, sometimes with despair. Indeed, the prospect enlivened him, stirred up his energy that always was simmering and now was boiling to be at work again.

Even in the ten minutes that Mr. Mossop was gone, he had been through one of his sketch-books in search of ideas half-developed in rapid pencil lines and finding one, the construction of a vast block of buildings, networked with scaffolding, crowned with those over-reaching cranes, the very insignia of modern progress; he was poring over it when the representative of Gleeson and Mills returned.



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"Here's your receipt, and there's your stamp on it," said Mr. Mossop.

Dicky never looked up. He was already pursuing hot-foot and in the eagerness of his mind this new thought of the beauty of labour. No one, as yet, in those days had brought forth one of the thousand etchings, the countless representations of this sign of the age. In the last ten years we have seen enough, more than enough of them. But Dicky Furlong must have been the first to realise the beauty of line in those slim, upstanding scaffold-poles, to find the grand simplicity of construction in the powerful angles of those leaning cranes. The seed of it had been sown in his picture "The Scavenger." This that he conceived then in those few moments when the heat of energy was on him was the fruit of it.

"Here's your receipt," repeated Mr. Mossop.

"All right—all right—take your money. It's on the table—take it and clear off—you've got all you came for, haven't you?"

For the second time Mr. Mossop counted the money and then put it in his pocket. With a last look round the white walls, at that fresco, quite meaningless to him, at Dicky engrossed in the subject he had so suddenly discovered, he turned to the stairs, thanking God, well within himself, for that wall-paper of full-blown roses in that last house, in the row of his suburban terrace.

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CHAPTER III

FOR the next few months there were days when, with the knocking of hunger at the door—a most excellent incentive—Dicky worked all day and every day. Within a week from the settlement of his account with Gleeson and Mills he had finished his sketch of the scaffolding and was ready for work upon his blocks of wood.

There was all the beauty of London in this—all the grandeur of labour, too. The time of day he chose was that half-hour before darkness, when half the world is still at work and the other half bestirring itself to the pleasures of the night to come. In the ragged light of the oil flares you can just see the dim figures of men upon the scaffolding.

The rest of the building sinks away into the black shadows of the surrounding houses, while all about and beyond the river you just dimly see in the middle distance, hangs a smoky twilight—the grey of pearl.

Against this, where here and there the orange flame of a light pricks out of the semi-darkness, the tapering scaffold poles and the leaning cranes stand out as velvet black in all the softness of that atmosphere.

This is that coloured wood-block which he called "The Tower of Babel," giving it its title long before ever he put his knife to the wood. For to him there was something more than just labelling his pictures



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with a name. When he conceived his title, then he knew the meaning of his work, and in the glitter of those flames the pigmy figures working in the light of them, the countless poles, like mast-heads in a crowded harbour stretching up into the sky, you heard, for all the softness of the evening's grey, that babel of sounds when some great house is a-building.

In those days, when indeed he was poor enough and food had to be bought with no small degree of bargaining in Great Titchfield Street Market, his only companion in the mornings until midday was Fanny, the charwoman, who did no more than look in and tidy up for the modest sum of seven shillings a week.

Upon the recommendation of Mrs. Sitwell, the housekeeper's wife, who had other floors to look after and would take the responsibility of no more work, Mrs. Samby had been called in and stood before Dicky in the studio. While he was bent close over a tricky piece of engraving she looked about her, wondering what manner of man this could be, though, in her varied experience of men, showing no symptom of surprise.

He had looked up at last, to find a woman in a black bonnet and a long black cape waiting patiently to hear his judgment on her. This was the first time that Dicky had engaged a servant in his life. The situation struck him as ludicrous. He smiled, and the smile was at himself. She smiled back, and the smile was at him.

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"Are you Mrs. Samby?" he had asked.

She clasped and unclasped her hands, saying that she was.

"Well, I'm not going to call you that," said he. "What can I call you?" As if everything were arranged and there were no more questions to be asked.

"My 'usband calls me Fanny," she replied; "that's what 'e calls me."

"Has he got a good reason to call you that?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's your name, I suppose," said Dicky.

She admitted that it was, and the ludicrousness of the interview making itself apparent to her, she began to laugh, saying how droll it was to be sure.

"Then I shall call you Fanny," said Dicky, to which she answered, "Very well, sir."

"Do you want to say anything else?" he enquired.

She did. It was not that she was ever very practical, or over-grasping of her rights, but she would like to know something about wages.

Primed up to this by Mrs. Sitwell, who in her turn had confidentially told Mrs. Samby what she was to expect, Dicky answered promptly that they would amount to seven shillings a week.

"But there may be some weeks," he added, "when I shan't be able to pay it."

"That's rather awkward, isn't it, sir?" said Fanny. He agreed that it was.

"Do you think you'll be able to pay it later?" she asked.



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"Why—yes—of course!" he exclaimed. "I didn't mean that you'd never get it."

She nodded her head as though, taking it all round, the whole arrangement was satisfactory.

"If I were well off," said Dicky, "you should have ten shillings a week; as it is——"

"Oh! I don't want no more than seven shillings a week—that is, if I can get it. I think I'll go and talk it over with my 'usband and let you know to-morrow mornin'."

On the morrow it transpired that Mr. Samby was agreeable.

"'E took a deal of persuadin'," said Fanny, "because 'e's like to be a bit maungy about money, my 'usband is."

"Maungy—what's maungy?" asked Dicky.

She held on to the hand-rail at the top of the stairs and hid her face with laughter.

"Dear—oh dear!" said she. "How droll to be sure."

But Dicky persisted, until he was told that in the Lincolnshire country, where she came from, maungy meant stingy. He had gathered that from the first, but the very sight of Fanny aroused in him a cheerful desire to make her laugh, to make her repeat again and again that one phrase of hers—how droll to be sure!

Here was a companionship then, ready-made and just when he was beginning to feel the need of it. From the very moment when she welcomed him in the morning till the last moment at mid-day, when



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her black bonnet bobbed out of sight down the studio stairs, she stirred in him a desire to win her laughter. Really, it was she by whom the quaint things were said and done. It needed only his comments on them to make her turn away in those fits of hilarity which she always thought it was good manners in a servant to endeavour to suppress.

It came in time that she expected nothing but laughter; when Dicky had merely to sit up in bed to her tentative wakening, and she would immediately stretch out her hand for the support of the curtain, while a smile began to twitch at the corners of her mouth. He had only to mention the housekeeper's wife, with the hacking of her everlasting cough, the eternal whistle of her parrot, and the endless barking of her dog in the basement—all of which noises escaped Mrs. Sitwell, since she was stone deaf—and Fanny would make at once for her stronghold, the handle of the door into the little washhouse, there standing for half-an-hour together listening to the folly of his humour.

For this was the only laughter that she had in an existence none too joyous in tenement buildings in the heart of Notting Hill. In a few weeks that rising at six o'clock in the morning, that tramping to the top of Queen's Road, where 'buses to Oxford Circus were only twopence, came to be a prelude to the very best of her day. She would hang about the studio, too, often an hour beyond her time, in the hope that there might be yet another occasion for laughter before she went.



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And quickly enough, Dicky came to know that this was expected of him. The mere sight of Fanny at the top of those studio stairs awakened in him the sense of his responsibilities. It would lift him out of the deepest depression which the loneliness of the night before might have brought him.

Yet he never realised that here again it was just the presence of a woman in his life—like some hidden vibration—which he needed to give impetus to his energies. It did not seem to matter that she dropped her aitches—indeed, Constance had done that; it did not seem to matter that the grey hairs of sixty years were in her head, whether she dressed in a bonnet or a hat, whether her shoes were high-heeled or flat upon the ground, as Fanny's were; it was just the something to work for without which, despite all his love of it, he might have been a dreamer and nothing else.

All the painting that he did in those days he would set up on the easel, calling Fanny for the opinion which he knew would always be the same.

"Oh! Mr. Furlong, it is nice! That's a real life-take-off, isn't it?"

"Do you understand it, Fanny?" he would ask. To which disconcerting question she might reply that she was sure she would if he didn't mind explaining it to her.

And what help do you imagine could there be in that? This was a side of Dicky Furlong of which I was always conscious, yet never could understand.



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"What's the good," I have said to him, "of wasting your time showing your stuff to her? She doesn't understand."

And I remember once his answering:

"It doesn't always want understanding. It doesn't always need a brick wall to throw a ball against. You can get a bounce out of it off the floor."

I have only been able to suppose by this that all he needed was to throw his mind against something; all that he needed was the rebound. Yet in every history of men of creative genius, I have never discovered such a similar relationship as that which existed between Dicky and Mrs. Samby, which lasted the entire period that he occupied the Ridinghouse Street studio.

"One of these days," I remember saying to him then, "you'll come up against a woman with as high an intelligence as your own—then you'll know what resilience really means."

And I said that out of the hazard of my mind, little thinking how much of prophecy those words contained; little thinking of the other influences through which he would pass before those words came true.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT might be said of Mrs. Samby's opinion or judgment upon Dicky would be interesting to dwell upon, but surely difficult to ascertain.



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Once, finding myself alone in the studio with her, I asked what she thought of him, and her reply—"Oh! he's a nice boy"—meant no more than a little tenderness in a heart which had long forgotten what tenderness might be. But when she added, "'E's so quaint in 'is ways," I gathered that even she, who had had her experience of men of all sorts, was well aware of the uncommon spirit of his personality.

She saw, indeed, the best, the most cheerful side of him, informing me that these were the only times in the day that she laughed—these mornings when she pottered about the studio, a business that she described as setting things to rights. This, certainly, was no light matter, for though he was careful and tidy enough over his paints, cleaning his brushes, scraping his palette with a care and consideration which none of the artists I have ever known have given evidence of, the studio itself would have fallen into the disordered dinginess of most studios long before it did, had it not been for Fanny.

Though she never approved of walls covered with white paper, she did her best to keep them clean, bringing insignificant bills to him for dusters and brushes, trembling internally lest he should think she had been extravagant.

"There's a little money you owe me, sir," she would say when, after three days' silence on the subject, uncomfortable little financial squabbles at home had driven her to the courage of confession.

"How much?" he would ask.

From out of the back regions of her old black



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skirt she would produce a filthy and crumpled piece of paper, spreading it out in her fingers, distressed in the fear that it might mean no more laughter for the rest of that day..

"One and ninepence halfpenny, sir."

"God!" Dicky had said in a tone of tragedy. "You're an expensive woman, Fanny. Luxurious creature, aren't you?"

She had not known what luxury meant, but she assured him that she tried her best not to be.

"You'll be wanting me to buy you diamonds next!" he exclaimed.

And when he had said that, then she knew it was all right—that it was all a joke—that this was only another of his drolleries. Whereupon she caught hold of the back of a chair nearest her and doubled up with that chuckling of suppressed laughter which always had the pleasurable effect of making Dicky think he had been funny whereas he may have said the most foolish thing in the world.

But in time the white walls of the studio grew dingy enough in that whirlpool of London smoke, despite all Fanny's efforts to preserve their pristine cleanliness. In time, too, when first the rush of his energy died down, Dicky began to realise the solitude of his evenings in the studio alone.

Mrs. Sitwell was no good, though when at times she brought him letters by the last post, he would even try to engage her in conversation. But as the months drew on, she became deafer and deafer, until most that passed between them had to be written on



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little scraps of paper, and there was no fun in that.

He had started a correspondence with Mrs. Flint on his arrival in London and, while the studio was in the making and the excitement of that life was fresh in his mind, he had written to her regularly every week. But humorous and distinctive as these epistles were, there were never the instincts of the born letter-writer in Dicky. So long as he kept to the regularity of it, this correspondence continued, but directly one week went by without his writing, then the back of it was broken. Certainly Mrs. Flint never gave in. Every Tuesday morning he received a letter, addressed in her firm handwriting, two and three sheets of it, telling him everything in a place where there was such monotony of littleness to tell.

"It's because there's so much to write about," he said in one of his letters to her, "that I suppose I hardly write at all. But when things happen—as they do every day—I think how they would amuse or interest you, and, to one of my lazy habits, I expect I think that's good enough. It's left to women to show us what unselfishness is. You must think often what an ungenerous brute I am."

She thought nothing of the kind, but nursed her love of him in that amazing secrecy of a woman's heart through all these silences, taking his letters when they came with such quietness as that any man other than Mr. Furlong might have seen the palpitating emotion which it offered to conceal.

"A letter from Dicky?" he would say. To which she would casually nod her head, laying it beside her



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plate unopened, as though it well could wait. But it would not have waited in silence, and, knowing this, she would engage him adroitly in conversation, till the very existence of the letter had almost passed out of his mind. If later in the day he would chance to remember it, asking what it contained, she would give him a brief summary of its contents, but the sheet of paper, sacred to her, never left her keeping. One by one they were all put away in a drawer in her bedroom, and indeed it has been partially from those letters which most generously she lent me, that I have been able to reconstruct the story of Dicky's life during his days in the Ridinghouse Street studio.

She was wise in her writing to him, too, for she never mentioned that aching at her heart for his companionship which in those days must have been a dull and ceaseless pain to her. Doubtless she knew, with an unerring instinct, how effectually such references to her affection would cause their correspondence inevitably to cease. So she wrote merely in reply to the things he told her, or she recounted the little daily news of the Mill when, feeling that in her he had a worthy friendship, Dicky continued, if only at intervals, to write of his ambitions, his projects and adventures for her eager perusal.

It was the need of companionship in the evenings and the finding of it in other art students from the Polytechnic and the Slade, who brought their friends round to the studio, that first began to break in upon the regularity of Dicky's correspondence.

A club was being founded on the wildest Utopian



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schemes by a member of that little community which used to meet in Dicky's studio. One and all they were going to profit by it, for one of these days the whole world would have heard of them. It was, indeed, to be the foundation of a new school of painting, beside which the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists would be all forgotten. And in those days, the days when they met in Dicky's studio, the only thing that hindered their inauguration was a matter of finance. They needed a gallery for the exhibition of their work, and as yet, between themselves, had only accumulated the sum of three pounds and a few odd shillings. It was not enough.

Supreme organiser and originator of the idea was an artist named Gilder, a smooth individual with straight and uncut hair who, through all seasons of the year, wore a top-hat and an overcoat to conceal from the pedestrian in the street the age and shabbiness of the coat he wore beneath. The silk hat, which was only paid the occasional attention of a rub from the sleeve of his coat, was a remnant of the days when Gilder had been an art master. Notwithstanding the uncut hair, he believed that it had impressed the students and had never found himself able to discard it.

A certain quality of arresting personality, the suggestion of mysterious secrecy with which he spoke to you, as though you were the only person in the world who would ever hear what he had to tell you, a play-acting method he had of punctuating his words with little, surprising gestures, giving weight to what



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he was going to say by first impressing his turned-down thumb on your knee, or of slowly catching your arm in a strength of grip which was astonishing in a man of his unhealthy appearance; but, above all, it was his ability to get everything done for him by the simple method of saying that he would not dream of asking such a favour, that made of him an attraction to Dicky from the first moment when they met.

Gilder, indeed, was no less impressed with Dicky himself, seeing quickly enough how this boy of a man who, in so short a time and with such little training, had made his impress on the minds of the best of the Bond Street dealers, could be of use to him in the schemes he was formulating in his mind.

He found no difficulty in persuading Dicky that he, too, was ambitious, inviting him to shows he occasionally gave in his own studio, where landscapes displaying no little quality of imagination, but strangely unequal and surprisingly inconsistent, were hung in second-hand frames round the walls.

Though few people were ever to be seen at these exhibitions, the little red wafers stuck on the glass of a number of the pictures to show you they were sold, inclined you to the belief that others had been to the studio besides yourself. Gilder, indeed, spoke of them, mentioned their names, recalling with mysterious smiles the complimentary things they had said about his work. With a certain amount of persuasion, he could be induced to repeat what these complimentary things were.

Yet he would never paint for the public, had all



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the unsuccessful artist's contempt of institutions and the like. Tone he spoke about in painting as a young curate speaks of the Holy Ghost. In those days he painted much still life and interiors, and mentioned the names of the Dutch painters in a whisper.

In the youthful ingenuousness of his heart, Dicky was readily taken in by him, failing to see the inherent instincts of the tradesman in Gilder's methods, believing that in his organisation of this artist's club, he was being instigated solely by his love of the work itself.

In the studio in Ridinghouse Street, in Gilder's own studio in the neighbourhood of Shepherd's Bush, they spent many an evening together, for there is no doubt that Gilder was a good conversationalist. He had the gift of suggestiveness, prompting many an idea in Dicky's mind. In this, indeed, he was theatrical too, introducing little French phrases into his speech, all gathered from a six-months' sojourn in Paris when he was a younger man. When writing to Dicky he always began, "*Mon cher*"; always concluded his epistles with the flourish, *à toi*, and signed himself "Cyrano." And this, as you might suppose, because his nose was the most conspicuous feature of his face.

His knowledge of the history of Art was far greater than Dicky's. He could speak of painters whom Dicky had never heard of and talk fluently and critically about their work.

Dicky preferred the evenings when he came to Ridinghouse Street, because with him, in his studio



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in Shepherd's Bush, lived Gilder's wife, who, from the first moment that they met, called Dicky by his Christian name. No doubt that little sense of dignity in his father peeped out in him then, when the sound of his name on her lips grated on his ears. From that first moment he took an otherwise unreasonable dislike to Mrs. Gilder, and doubtless on this account. Therefore, whenever it was possible he contrived that Gilder should come to his own studio.

It always amazed Dicky that Gilder, who declared himself a hater of women, should have married at all; still more surprising was it that, having done so, he should have chosen the woman he had.

"What is it you dislike about women?" Dicky had boldly asked him one evening as they sat over the stove in the studio waiting for the kettle to boil for the coffee-making that was to follow.

Gilder looked at him for a moment in silence, but in the smile he allowed to play about his mouth there was something mysterious, which might easily have been understood to mean a great deal. Presently he took a cigarette from a quantity loose in his pocket, lit a match, lit his cigarette, and, blowing it out, put the burnt match back in the match-box, closing it with an expressive movement of finger and thumb. This was the only habit of tidiness he was ever known to display. They said among themselves, those other students of his acquaintance, that he had never taken off his clothes to go to sleep in his life. But this was not true. Dicky knew that on the one occasion when he had stayed the night in his studio, he had



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taken off all his things and donned a dirty linen night-shirt which he had brought with him. Yet even this may have been merely his company manners.

"Well—what is it?" Dicky had persisted when the enigmatic smile was beginning to annoy him and the expressiveness of that finger and thumb had exhausted its meaning.

"My dear boy," said Gilder, "if you'd had to talk to women about painting as much as I have you'd hate them, too. They're like cows with their backs turned to the rain."

He was happy like this sometimes in his phrases, however false his sentiments may have been. Indeed, writing, besides painting, was one of his accomplishments. He had written lyrics that were set to music and many that were not. He had written one-act plays which amateur companies had performed. He was full of ideas.

Many were the times he suggested pictures to Dicky which Dicky never painted. Yet there is no doubt he was a stimulus to Dicky's mind—a stimulus irritating him to the conception of ideas that were his own.

One night, some few months after their first meeting, when they had been talking over the fire ever since the dinner which they had eaten together in Soho, Dicky accompanied him down the studio stairs, out into the street as he went to catch his 'bus to Shepherd's Bush.

They had been talking of women and of work—the two healthiest subjects a young man can engross

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his mind with. Dicky's defence of them had been tentative. He was not one to recount with pride the incidents of his past. As long as Gilder had known him, he had mentioned no woman's name. It was just a fact to him that Dicky had been married, and that was all. That he had a son alive and in London, not one of those men who came so often to his studio were aware.

As they neared Oxford Circus, Gilder affectionately took his arm in a warm grip.

"This is what I don't like about women, dear old boy," said he mysteriously.

"What?" asked Dicky.

"This girl—see this girl coming towards us now."

"What about her?"

"The *demi-vierge*, dear old boy—look at her. See that cock of the head. Inviting acquaintance and ready to snub it when it's offered. Oh! they're cats—they're cats, dear old boy!"

To all of this, Dicky made no reply. Gilder had drawn his attention to the girl who was coming towards them, and nothing that he was saying in contempt of her could distract it. For she was not one of the women who walk the streets. That at a glance was obvious. Yet she was walking with that uncertainty of gait which indicates the social vagabondage of life.

As they passed her, Dicky looked into her face. And almost, he thought at that moment, she was beautiful. For perhaps it was her eyes which arrested his attention. They were the features of a



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woman's face he always looked to first. So it was in men, with whom brown eyes always brought him a sense of mistrust. Gilder's eyes were brown. This girl's, too, were dark, but in his quick glance at her, he had assumed that they were grey. The lashes were long and overshadowed them, the brows were firmly arched. The swift impression he had gathered of her face had shown him a perfect oval; beyond this no more. It was really the eyes alone at which he had looked, the eyes alone that had arrested him, for as they met his, he thought he saw, as Gilder had suggested, that invitation to acquaintance passing in a flash from her to him.

"Eh—what did I tell you, *cher ami*?" Gilder murmured to him as she passed.

Dicky looked back over his shoulder. The girl had looked back, too. There again was the invitation to acquaintance, betrayed even in the twist of her head, the very inclination of her body.

"I'm going back to talk to her," said Dicky and wheeled Gilder round upon his arm.

"She'll snub you," declared Gilder in an effort to dissuade him. This was Regent Street at half-past eleven at night. There were plenty of people about; some who might recognise him. He had no sense of adventure to warm his blood. Neither had he Dicky's freedom. But imagining he saw that almost imperceptible slackening in her walk, Dicky was deaf to his dissuasion.

"Oh! come along," said he, "damn it!"



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Gilder disengaged his arm, muttering something about his last 'bus.

Dicky shrugged his shoulders and walked on in her direction alone.

"She'll snub you," said Gilder with a laugh, and hurried away to catch his 'bus. But when the opportunity offered, he slipped into a sheltering doorway, where, at a safe distance, he watched the encounter with all the morbid interest of a married man.

CHAPTER V.

IT is quite possible that if Gilder had accompanied him on his experiment, Dicky might indeed have been snubbed. For when in search of adventure and by herself, a woman must form her opinions quickly and shrewdly, having no time for niceties of judgment, but leaping rather to conclusions from the mere impetus of her instinct alone. And in such a moment as this there are but few categories in which a man can be placed. He is capable of management or he is not; he is worthy or unworthy of trust; he attracts her physically or he repels. From a swift glance at his face she must come to her decision upon these matters, and at once.

Now with the presence of Gilder in his top-hat, having all that suggestion of the unwashed about him, with his contempt for women showing, as it always did, in a certain sleekness of courtesy towards the sex, all that was favourable in Dicky might have



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been over-ruled in her mind. As he had supposed, she was not a woman of the streets. The chances are she would have fulfilled Gilder's opinion of her—the *dilettante demi-vierge*—she would have snubbed them both.

But by some intuition, as though there were eyes in the back of her head, for she had not turned round again, she seemed to know that Dicky alone was following her. Still imperceptibly the pace of her steps decreased, and who may say that her heart was not beating in proportion the faster as she heard him just behind her? No woman grows so old as that these little adventures fail to stimulate the beating of her heart—no woman becomes so inured.

"My friend," said Dicky as he came alongside of her, "said you'd snub me if I spoke to you. Now if you want to snub me, will you say so?"

She stopped, looked up at him and laughed. Instinct assured her at once that her trust would not be misplaced in a man who could begin an acquaintance like that. Moreover, she had laughed, and, in such matters as this, once make a woman laugh and the first and most insurmountable barrier of all is disposed of.

"What did he know about it?" said she.

Dicky was conscious of surprise at the refinement of her voice, yet it was not the moment to dwell upon such thoughts as that. In these adventures one may begin too well, when any sudden relapse into the silence of speculation will undo all the good that has been done.

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Fully aware of this, Dicky answered her at once. It was, he said, the attitude of his friend towards all women, that they did not mean what they said.

"But I hadn't said anything," said she.

"No," replied Dicky, "but didn't your eye catch mine as we passed?"

"Well?"

"Well, in these kinds of encounter that says a good deal, doesn't it?"

In the sudden setting of her upper lip, Dicky saw not only the swiftness of her temper, but the whole determination of her character beside. Instinct in him then told him at once the type of woman she was, but it was in the nature of him as a man, immediately to forget it. For it is only in moments that men are dispassionate about women, while half their lives through, women are being dispassionate about men.

"Do you mean," she asked him, with that upper lip still set, "that I invited you to come and speak to me?"

It was precisely what she had done, and he knew it and she knew it. But she was inviting denial, wherefore, it being so early in their acquaintance, he gave it, as any other man would have done.

"I hope I shouldn't do that sort of thing," said she, "at least, not to a perfect stranger."

"I don't suppose you would," said Dicky meekly, dimly aware that already he was being managed, yet sufficiently attracted by the oval face, the dark eyes, the mouth which, for all the straightness of its upper



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lip, was fascinating, as to submit quite cheerfully to her domination.

"Where are you off to now?" he added.

"Euston Station."

"Why, where do you get to from there?"

"I'm not going to get anywhere."

He looked puzzled, asking her what she meant.

"I'm going to stay the night there—in the waiting-room."

His surprise became amazement.

"Euston? All night in a waiting-room?"

She broke out into laughter. He could see the whiteness of her teeth in the lamplight.

"Well, there's nothing so strange in that, is there?" said she. "I've done it once before."

"Don't you live anywhere then?"

"Yes—I'm one of the girls in Gleeson and Mills'. I've been out to a theatre and got back late. They shut the doors at eleven and lock 'em at twenty past. I'm locked out. I've been locked out before. I've stayed the night at Euston Station before."

A wave of admiration at her pluck passed over him. Life was amazingly hard for women. What an opportunity—what a temptation for a girl to go wrong. Yet something in the way she had said she was going to Euston and had been there before, convinced him that she was straight. All these thoughts flashed through his mind before he could reply.

"Won't you be frightfully cold there?" said he. "It's such a rotten night."

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"Oh, no—they have a fire up to a certain time. There are always trains coming in and going out. Where do you live? Would you like to see me a bit of the way back to my hotel—what?"

She could laugh. She burst out laughing then. But Dicky, thinking of the comfort of his studio, could only stand looking at her, still confused in his amazement.

"I live back here," said he, "in a studio behind Queen's Hall."

"Are you an artist then?" she inquired.

He nodded his head.

"How jolly! Let me see some of your pictures."

"What, now?"

"Yes—there's tons of time. They never go to bed in my hotel."

Possibly she saw him pause. Probably he did. Every man knows himself; but there are few women with all their experience of men who act as if they knew anything about them. If Dicky paused, it was on the thought of the temptation to himself. The advantage was on his side, and was it unfair to take it?

"You're married, are you?" said she.

He shook his head.

She took his arm, sure enough of her man then, well aware that in matters of this nature he was capable of management. For in those few moments she had calculated to a fraction the distance to which she could trust him. And this is no extraordinary feat to a woman who must live by her wits.



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"Oh, well—come along," said she, "I don't want to go to my soft down pillow just yet."

So they moved off together in the direction of the studio, and, as they disappeared into the shadows of Ridinghouse Street, Gilder emerged from the seclusion of his doorway, going home slowly to his wife in Shepherd's Bush.

CHAPTER VI

RISK is not the flavour, it is the spirit in the wine of adventure.

The exhilarating sting of it must have tasted keen on the lips of Fanny Cornish as she followed at Dicky's heels up the three dark flights of stairs to the studio in Ridinghouse Street. For what might she not have imagined was to be the end of it all with a man whom she had never seen in her life before? Yet this was the risk of it, the spirit in the wine that made it worth the drinking. She had taken her gauge of Dicky's character, and though there were moments in the ascent of those narrow, unlighted stairs when courage almost failed her, she was determined to see it through.

When at last they reached the studio itself, when Dicky had lit the bare gas bracket and flung open the door of the stove, she looked about her, knowing then that her estimate was not at fault.

"Well?" said he when candles had been lit as well



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and the whole studio was looking as it flattered his pride to see it. "Well?"

"Do you live here?" she asked. And that was all. Never a word or an exclamation of pleasure at the sight of his studio, in which all his house-pride was concentrated. For it was his. There he did his work, and there was not a studio he had seen to compare with it. Surely it was better than the waiting-room at Euston Station.

"Yes, I live here," said he, "there's my bed behind that curtain." But he was bitterly disappointed. However, the new sight of her in a brighter light soon made him forget it. He studied her face with a fresh interest; saw it outlined in dry-point, sketched in charcoal, painted in oils. Doubtless he saw it, too, as when a man would caress it. He was alone in the world; she was alone with him. How could the thought have escaped him? Yet it can only have sped in the mere passing of a moment through his mind. He was more anxious then to please her with his studio, more eager to listen to her appreciation of his work.

"Do you have a servant at all?" she asked. These were practical questions, and he knew nothing of that side of a woman's nature, but was to learn as time went on.

He told her of Fanny, wondering why she should be interested to know.

"Fanny's my name," said she, and with a look sent his thoughts back to his knowledge that they were alone.



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"Fanny what?" he asked. He thought he understood it well enough when she paused in her reply.

"Fanny Marshall," said she.

It would be hard to know why she thought it necessary to tell the lie. There were relations it is true—an uncle and aunt in Brixton, who kept an eye upon the doings of their niece. Calculation and a justifiable precaution were her principal reasons, no doubt. Perhaps as well the truth did not come to her so easily as it did to Dicky when he answered "Richard Furlong" to the same question which she put to him.

But then, as a rule, this sort of veracity is nothing but pride in a man. She had no cause to be proud of her name; yet ninety women out of a hundred might have told the truth about it. For what did it really matter? She was trusting Dicky, so far; why not the one step further? However, that was her nature. She had what is so uncommon in women, a mathematical mind. She was always adding her two and two together and making four, more times than you would have believed it to be possible. For with the majority of women it is that in this simple matter of human, everyday arithmetic they will add their two and two together and give you five. But this was not so in the case of Fanny Cornish. When she did not offer you four, she gave you three.

To the influence of such a nature as this came Dicky, when his knowledge of women was by no means so deep as he supposed. Yet even here, and through no intention of her own, their acquaintance served its end in the development of his work.

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When she had done looking about her, then with no little presence of mind, she dropped herself on to a soft divan near the stove, asking what pictures he had got to show her.

"Have some coffee first," said he.

"Coffee?" she looked up with a practical mind, debating the wisdom of it at that time of night; with a still more practical mind deciding that as it was not likely there would be much sleep for her, she said she might as well. So he set to work making coffee, not realising that if she had been a woman as he had found them all his life through, she would have been up and making it herself. As it was, she lolled back on her divan, contentedly watching him.

"How long have you been here by yourself?" she inquired presently.

He told her how long—how many months.

"Are you very successful as an artist?"

"Fairly—I'm getting on—I'm going to get there one of these days."

There was no clenching of the teeth about it as he said this. It was just a quiet and convinced determination. She did not quite realise all he meant, but it impressed her.

"Going to get where?" she asked.

"Well, going to—to do something worth doing."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said she.

"Wouldn't you?" He stopped all the coffee-making to ask her why.

"Oh, the way you talk about it. Don't spill the coffee."



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She brought him quickly enough to the remembrance of what he was doing. Presently he came with two cups of steaming coffee in his hands.

"Like to see some of my pictures now?" said he.

She sipped from her cup and nodded her head. He put his own cup down, hurrying at once to the wall where all the pictures he had done were standing. First one and then another he turned back, deciding at last the one with which to begin his little exhibition.

It was a study of a model in the nude—the only model he had been able to afford in those first few months in his studio. And it was like all Dicky's studies—he had made a picture of it. Insufficiency of training was always conscious in his mind when he came to figure work, but he had the brilliancy of technique, the mastery of tone with which to hide all that he did not know.

For a little while she sat in silence looking at it, but thinking in that calculating mind of hers that he had shown it her for only one reason, to set their acquaintance on a more intimate footing, to introduce the intimate note into their conversation. Well, he should not be disappointed. She was by no means averse to talking of such things. It would take a great deal, she believed, to shock her.

"You artists," said she, "always seem to make your work an excuse to paint that kind of thing."

She could at least tell him the truth about himself, she thought, and, when she saw his look of amazement, was convinced that it was a truth he had never

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expected to hear. Indeed, she laughed at his bewildered expression. He had scarcely expected to meet such a girl as herself in Regent Street at half-past eleven at night.

But Dicky's amazement, as may readily be supposed, was of disappointment, and for the second time that evening. Waiting in all eagerness to hear what she thought of his work, since she herself had been the first to ask to see it, he found himself met with such a remark as this:

"Why do you think we need an excuse?" he asked; "an excuse for what?"

"All men are the same," was her reply.

"The same as what?" he persisted.

She shrugged her shoulders with an attractive gesture and spread out her hands to the fire. If he liked to be obtuse, well, there was no more to be said.

But Dicky was not so obtuse as all that. She had succeeded in bringing his mind for the moment to her outlook. He knew what all men were, and, seeing her seated there with the light of the stove on her face, her hair disengaged from the hat which she had dropped upon the floor at her side, he thought perhaps what all men in the same circumstances would have thought. That slight gesture of the shoulders, the fascinating profile of her face lit up by the glow of the stove, the little wisps of dark brown hair that caught the light as they made a trellis across her forehead, all these things inevitably attracted him. He thought how infinitely preferable it would be for her to stay there in his companionship, rather than



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go to the cheerless gloom of the waiting-room at Euston Station.

This doubtless was the very thing she meant him to think, perhaps the very thing she was thinking herself, for knowing that he was watching her then, she leant back her head as though in thought and let him see the fine curve of her neck.

Now, for all his experience of them, Dicky's knowledge of women was small. In a sudden moment he found himself struggling with a desire, telling himself again that the advantage was all on his side; that there in that studio, alone with him, she was in his hands for him to make what proposal he chose.

With an almost puritanical contempt of himself for the thought, he turned and put the picture away, half conscious that, without any intention of his, it had been the first seed in his mind.

She looked round the studio while he searched for another picture—looked at the fresco of the journey of the sun, at the curtain that shielded his truckle bed, and then shivered, thinking of the barren comfort of the Euston waiting-room. Her eyes were full of calculation as they turned to watch him seeking for his picture.

"Well—here's another," said he, and brought her out the first print of the Tower of Babel—completed but a few days before. Gilder had been silent when first he had seen it. All the other men who came there to the studio had lost envy in admiration, admiration in envy, according to the temperament of each one as he saw it.



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She looked at it critically, as she knew he expected her to look, with her head attractingly a little on one side, an arm stretched out across her knee, the hand depending gracefully from the curve of her wrist. Directly she was aware that he was looking at her, she allowed herself to become conscious of this display of her ankles, uncrossed her legs and drew down her skirt about them.

"That's charming, isn't it?" said she. "Was that man you were with this evening—was he an artist, too?"

Dicky leant the picture back once more against the wall and returned to his coffee. Even Mrs. Flint and Constance, more than anyone, would have seen his resignation to disappointment then. Their hearts would have gone out to him. He drew a chair up to the stove, seating himself beside her.

"Yes," said he, "Gilder's his name—he's an artist."

For a while they sat in silence, Dicky with his elbow on his knees, staring solemnly into the fire. Then suddenly he remembered how she had told him that she was one of the girls in Gleeson and Mills', at whose establishment he had bought all the draperies and curtains for his studio. He tried to recall the name of the little man who had come up the stairs that day for the settlement of their account, and when it came to him, turned suddenly, asking her if she knew anyone of the name of Mossop in their firm.



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She was full of surprise, with interest swiftly awakened.

"Know him? Yes, of course I do—he's one of our salesmen—a little beast—I hate him. How did you come to hear of him?"

Dicky explained, whereupon for the next quarter of an hour she talked to him, full of animation, full of interest about herself and the hardships of the lives of those girls who worked for Gleeson and Mills.

It was vastly entertaining all she told him—how the other girls were jealous if one of them was called for by some gentleman in a motor car whenever a holiday brought them freedom; how the older women talked about it for days afterwards, making it a subject for gossip in that little world of theirs.

"And do you ever transgress in that way?" he asked, which was just the very question she was eager to answer. So she pursed her lips as though it rather seemed to her he was wanting to know too much, and she replied:

"Well, two of my friends have cars. Have you got a car?"

He laughed.

"No," said he; "but I've got a couple of sausages for breakfast to-morrow morning."

But she didn't mind the life at Gleeson and Mills', she went on enthusiastically to tell him. It was not so bad. There were some very nice girls there, and they had tremendous fun sometimes.

"What sort of fun?" he asked.

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"Oh!—I couldn't tell you," she replied archly.

He might think what he liked; in fact, she had no desire that he should not.

"And what'll happen to you to-morrow," he asked presently, "after you've been out all night?"

She wrinkled her brows.

"Goodness only knows," said she. "All depends if they believe that I spent the night at Euston."

"You can prove that you have, can't you?"

She shook her head.

"Not unless I get a porter to come and swear to them that he saw me there, and I'm not going to place myself in the hands of men like that. I know what those porters are like. I've stayed there once before."

"Did they believe you then?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, supposing they don't this time?"

"Oh, I shall get the sack—that's all."

"You don't care?"

"No, I don't care really."

"Then stay here. It's more comfortable than that beastly waiting-room."

He had it out before he meant to, but even then did not intend all that she took him at once to mean. No doubt it was the glow of that fire on her face, the thought of them sitting there alone, with not a soul to know. But never in his heart did Dicky mean the fullness of construction which she immediately had put upon it.

With an assured smile that came at once to her lips,



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she drew herself away from him, never for a moment unpossessed, never for a moment confused at his suggestion.

"Oh!" said she contemptuously, "you think I'm that sort of girl. And I'd almost begun to believe you weren't like the rest of the men one meets."

It would have needed less than the contempt of Fanny Cornish; indeed, the contempt of any woman would have brought Dicky to confusion. Even when, as now, he knew it was ill-deserved, he felt himself to be awkward and at a disadvantage. It was this sensitiveness, no doubt, that made him easy of management, and Fanny Cornish had seen it from the very first. Yet he protested, and quickly enough, in his own defence.

"I had no intention to give you reason to jump to that conclusion," said he; then, whether it were a lie or not, he had no time to make certain in his mind, but he added: "I didn't make that suggestion as the men you meet would seem to have made it. I meant that you should have my bed and I could sleep here on the divan. That'd be better than Euston Station, wouldn't it?"

What this may not have led to he made no attempt to suppose. Seduction was unknown to Dicky's mind. If they drifted into intimacy, as might very likely have been possible, that was another matter and not for his consideration. He took life and its adventures far too easily for that. And in the better and deeper recesses of her understanding, she knew that he had spoken the truth. But her knowledge of

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men and that superficially virtuous attitude towards life prompted her to believe the contrary.

"Well, it's very nice of you, I'm sure," said she, ringing the note of sarcasm in her voice. "But you hardly take into consideration what people would think."

"What people?" he asked at once.

For the moment she could give no answer, then seized upon the thought of the woman who attended him in the mornings.

"Fanny!" he exclaimed. "What do you think old Fanny would say? She wouldn't know who you were. Besides, Fanny—she's far too simple to have any of those suspicions. If I told her you'd had nowhere to sleep and that I gave you my bed and slept on the divan myself, she'd believe me—every word of it."

She sat for a moment, thinking over that.

"Don't you find this fire very hot?" she said at last.

He offered to move her chair, but she declared she was quite comfortable.

"If I move further back," said she, "I shall get too cold. What's the time?"

He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to one.

"I shall have to go in a minute or two," said she, and settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

Dicky sat looking at her then under the shadow of his eyes. One day he would make a picture of her. There was a fascinating elusiveness about her which it urged him to portray. There was no adventure in this life but what it led to something.



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Had she stayed the night, sleeping in his bed, he fully believed that no harm could possibly come to her from him. It was that elusiveness which charmed at the same time that it suppressed him. He would have liked to have seen her sleeping there quietly in his bed. He would have liked to have kissed her as he said good-night. She had made this impression on him, but he fully believed that was all.

For what really would it matter? In that odd world of his there were no appearances to be kept up. Why could not men and women be like children? What an absurd convention it was that forced her to go and sleep the night in a gloomy waiting-room in Euston Station.

"It's very cosy here— isn't it?" she said presently out of the quietness.

"Then why don't you stay?" said he. "And, believe me, I mean nothing by that."

It was the vivid imagination in him which made him see them both as a couple of children sharing the same room. She had no such imagination as this. But the quality was not wanting in her. It was at work in her mind even then.

"Don't you really?" she replied.

And Dicky assured her most vehemently again that he did not.

"Don't think I mind for myself," said she. "I think I can take care of myself; but—oh, no! Of course, it's quite silly to think about it. I couldn't."

They dropped to silence again. The candles guttered out. There was only the dim light of the sput-



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tering gas jet. And still Dicky watched, becoming every minute more aware and more charmed by that subtle elusiveness in her.

Another ten minutes went by in silence. He felt sleep creeping over him with the warmth of the stove. His eyelids began to drop. With an effort he raised them and looked at her. Her eyelids were dropping, too. Her head was nodding. She smiled. She was falling off to sleep. Then he had a dim impression of her body suddenly pitching forward. The next moment she was lying still in a huddled bundle at his feet. She had fainted.

And this was Fanny Cornish's method of consent.

CHAPTER VII

IT was not in Dicky's knowledge of women to feel her pulse, or he might have learnt much, to his surprise, and none of the events which follow after would ever have taken place. Indeed, it may well be said it were better he did not.

For some moments he stood there looking helplessly down at her, not exactly afraid, for the colour was still bright in her cheeks, but distressed in mind at the want of knowing what to do. Pity, too, overwhelmed him. Perhaps she had been without food. Women were fools; they never fed themselves properly. She had been upon her feet all day behind one of those ghastly counters, and now at this time of night was compelled to walk the streets to find an



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ultimate shelter in Euston Station. Yet with all this exhaustion she had talked on bravely and brightly to him, never uttering one word of complaint, declaring even that there were aspects of her work which pleased her well enough.

He bent down and leant her shoulders against his knee, and, having heard somewhere or other that this was the position in which a woman most quickly revived, let her head fall loosely back.

"Miss Marshall!" he whispered, "Miss Marshall!"

But she made no reply. Her lips were faintly parted to a gentle breathing, her eyes were closed. She might have been asleep.

"Well, she can't go now," he said aloud; "I shall have to clear out into the street—if she wants to stay here alone."

Her eyelids twitched.

"Miss Marshall!" he whispered again. But still she did not move. "My God!" he muttered, "I wonder how long they stay like this."

When a few more moments had passed and she still made no movement, he laid her gently back on the floor—a child in these experiences—hurrying to get some water from his washhandstand. As he came back with the carafe in his hand she stirred. He flicked some drops of water over her face and her eyes opened.

"Where am I?" she whispered.

"Here—in my studio," said Dicky, powerless to give any better answer than that.

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"Whose studio?" she muttered vaguely, and tried to sit up.

"Dicky Furlong's my name," said he, feeling an utter fool in his predicament.

Then recognition and remembrance came slowly into her eyes.

"What happened?" she asked weakly.

"You fainted."

"I did?"

"Yes."

"Oh—I am so sorry—how utterly foolish of me! Oh, dear!—I am so sorry! I've never done a thing like that before. What a fool you must think I am!"

"A fool!" said Dicky tenderly, "indeed you're not. It must have been the heat and fumes of that beastly stove."

"I suppose it was," said she. "I am so sorry."

"Well, for God's sake don't keep on saying you're sorry!" he exclaimed. "You couldn't help it."

He bent forward quickly as she tried to get to her feet. It seemed her limbs were weak. She tottered and half fell, murmuring how ridiculous it was, assuring him she could not understand it.

Dicky paid no more attention to her then. He just picked her up in his arms and brought her to the bed, laying her there with her head upon the pillows. "That's where you've got to stay," said he; "there's going to be no Euston Station for you to-night."

"Oh, but I must!" said she faintly. "I couldn't stay here. It's awfully kind of you, but I couldn't."

"Heavens! she's got some pluck!" he thought, and



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declared more vehemently than ever that he would not let her go. "I'll go out myself," said he, "if you must be alone."

"No, I won't have you do that," she exclaimed; "I won't turn you out on to the streets. But how—how am I going to undress?"

"You will stay then!"

"Yes, I don't think I could face that waiting-room."

"Well, then, I'll go out—I'll go out on to the landing while you get into bed."

"You're very good to me," said she.

He scoffed at that and disappeared down the stairs.

As soon as he was gone, she rose from the bed and looked at her reflection in the mirror, tidied her hair, and slipped off her clothes, thinking how little she had imagined that that would be her bed this night.

When she was ready and looking as attractive as a woman can who is expecting the presence of a man at her bedside, she called out to Dicky that she was all right.

He came up the stairs into the studio again, not knowing exactly where to look. And this was not because he was a fool with women. It was all because of the way she had managed him. But he had to pass the bed to get a blanket from a cupboard where all things necessary to the life of the studio were kept. It was then she made him look at her.

"I shall be miserable thinking of you on that divan," said she.

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"You go to sleep," he replied, "and don't you worry about me. I shall wrap myself up in a blanket and sleep like a top."

As he came back again with the blanket over his arm, she murmured "Good-night" to him.

"Feel better now?" he asked.

"Yes—much—much better, thanks."

"Well—good-night."

"Good-night," she whispered. She put the faint note of a caress into her voice, and when he continued on his way, disappearing behind the other side of the curtains, she made a petulant moue of her lips, a shrug of her shoulders, and turned over on the pillows to go to sleep.

A moment later Dicky put out the light that was wheezing through the naked gas-jet. The whole studio was in darkness when for an hour he lay awake on his divan, staring at the glow of the fire in the stove and listening to the even monotony of her breathing.

CHAPTER VIII

AT half-past seven o'clock in the morning, when Miss Cornish was still fast asleep, and Dicky, after none too comfortable a night on the divan, was lying awake recalling all the incidents of the night before, he listened to the studio door being opened, smiling to himself as he saw the top of Fanny's old jet bonnet rising above the floor.



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The first instinct to call her to him and explain matters gave way in his mind to the humour of the situation and the desire to watch Fanny's face.

Taking off her bonnet and cape, she deposited it on the nail in the door that led into the little scullery. Then she tied her apron round her waist, regarding herself in a long glass on the wall, making herself look tidy, and just to please him. This was the best part of her day; the only time in her life when she ever had occasion for laughter. She owed it in gratitude to him to look her best, knowing that he liked her so, because it was he who had bought her the apron, he who had given her the black skirt to wear in place of that garment in which she always felt so comfortable at home.

When the bow was settled to her liking at her neck, and she had performed all those little operations before a mirror of which, no matter how old she is, a woman never loses the touch, she turned to the curtains about to call him.

It was with the greatest effort that Dicky controlled the sound of his laughter as he saw the change of expression from pleasant vanity to painful surprise that passed across her face. For the moment all power of movement seemed to be arrested in her as she stood there gazing towards the bed. At last, lifting her eyes upwards, she turned away when, still in a convulsion of laughter, Dicky heard the sigh that escaped her lips.

Then she caught sight of him on the divan. Immediately half closing his eyes, he pretended to be

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asleep, still watching her while she summoned up her courage to come and wake him.

Seemingly it needed no little effort on her part, but at last she crept across the studio to his side.

"Mr. Furlong," she whispered, "it's after half-past seven." When Dicky stirred and grunted in the pretence of semi-wakefulness, she whispered again, "It's after half-past seven, sir."

He opened his eyes and stared at her. When was she going to say what she had seen?

"Hullo, Fanny," said he.

"Good morning, sir," she replied. She was more distant and respectful than ever she had been in her life before. But she said no word of what she knew.

"What sort of a morning is it, Fanny?" he asked.

"Oh, it's a nice fine day, sir."

He looked up at her in anticipation, but still she was silent.

"This blooming divan's confoundedly uncomfortable," said he, in the desire to give her a lead.

"I expect it is," she replied quietly, and then he received the impression that, in the heart of her, Fanny was hurt; that, as is the way with all good women, she had put him on a pedestal, and now in the secret recesses of her mind was shedding tears over his downfall.

"Fanny," said he.

"Yes, sir."

"You're an old fool."

"Am I, sir?"

"Of course you are; why don't you say"—he low-

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ered his voice—"that you've seen the lady in my bed?"

"I'm sure it's nothing to do with me, sir," she replied, and for some reason or other Dicky felt conscious of a sense of satisfaction that things were by no means so bad as they seemed.

"Go and wake the lady," said he, "and ask her if she wants some tea."

In obedience she took a few steps away from the divan, then, hesitating and confused, she returned to his side.

"What am I to call her, please, Mr. Furlong?" she asked pitifully. "Am I to call her miss or ma'am?"

"I suppose you think I'm a lost soul, Fanny," said he.

"Oh—no, sir—I don't. Young men will be young men. It ain't no business of mine."

"Call her miss," said Dicky, "and don't be an old fool, Fanny. What do you want to judge by appearances for? Hang it, it's my bed, isn't it? Try and think it's possible for two people to have been in one room together like a couple of children—because that's what's happened. She's as straight as you are, Fanny. Go and ask her if she wants some tea."

She believed every word he said, which is to her credit; yet, with no little shyness, not having quite made up her mind as to what she ought to think of a young woman who would accept a man's bed and turn him out on to a sofa, she went to do as she was bid.

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Nevertheless, she did her utmost to make her voice sound respectful. From the divan Dicky smiled at the effort she made.

"Would you like some tea, miss?" she asked, standing some distance from the bed, as though nothing nearer would be safe. When there was no reply she repeated her question, and in exactly the same tone of voice.

Fanny Cornish sat up suddenly, with the bedclothes falling from her, rubbing her eyes.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, staring at Fanny. Then, as her eyes wandered past the curtain, she gathered the wits of remembrance. "Tea?" she repeated, "yes; I should, very much."

Mrs. Samby went away to the scullery to make it when, peering through a chink in the curtains, Fanny could see the rest of the studio; could see Dicky lying, his hair dishevelled, on the divan.

"Are you there, Mr. Furlong?" she called out.

"Yes," said he; "I'm here all right."

"I hope you weren't too frightfully uncomfortable on that sofa thing."

"Not so bad," he replied. "You slept all right, anyhow. How do you feel now?"

"How do I feel? Oh, yes; I feel splendid now. What's the time?"

"Getting on for eight."

"Well, I shall have to be in by nine."

"What are you going to say to them?"

"Oh, just that I stayed the night with a friend. They'll have to believe me or not, as they like."

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He flung the blanket off him and got up. He had worn his clothes all night, was feeling uncomfortable and half disgusted with himself. When he had ducked his head in cold water in the scullery, he said he would go out until she was dressed.

"I'll give you a quarter of an hour," said he, "then I'll come back and we'll have breakfast."

She made many inquiries of Mrs. Samby while she was putting on her clothes, asking whether he had ever exhibited at the Royal Academy and supposing that one of these days he was going to make a great name for himself. But Fanny was not to be drawn into communication with an utter stranger. She answered properly, she hoped. She could tell by her voice that Miss Cornish was a lady, and more shame to her for that reason for allowing herself to get into such a position. But there was not much information to be got out of her. She went about her work all the time, laying out the breakfast and never stopping, as she did with Dicky, with her hand for support on the handle of the nearest door.

"I wasn't goin' to tell 'er nothin', Mr. Furlong," she said when Fanny Cornish had gone; "and she asked me such a lot of questions—oh, dear, didn't she ask a lot! All about you. I don't know if she's a friend of yours, Mr. Furlong; indeed, I don't see 'ow she can be if you only met her last night—but I call it cheek the way she went on."

Then Fanny gave imitations of the young lady's voice and the questions she had put, alternating the

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tone of voice to that of her own as she told him her evasive replies.

" 'Dear me,' I said to 'er, 'we should be wise,' I said, 'if we got answers to all the questions,' I said, 'that we liked to ask.' "

"And what did she say to that?" inquired Dicky.

Fanny pursed her lips and minced her voice, folding her hands in front of her and tossing her head a little on one side to give the impression of Miss Cornish speaking:

" 'There's no 'arm in askin' questions,' she said. 'Even if people aren't perlite enough,' she said, 'to answer them.' "

Dicky smothered his laughter, and setting herself straight again, bringing her lips to their normal expression, she assumed her natural voice once more as she told him her reply:

" 'There's perlitiness in askin' questions,' I said, 'and there's perlitiness in not answering 'em. It all depends,' I said, 'how you look at it.' That's the answer I gave her to that. But I spoke quite respectful to 'er, Mr. Furlong—I didn't forget my place."

"I suppose you think she's not quite a proper kind of lady?" said Dicky.

Fanny expressed all she thought of her in her face, and then replied guardedly that it was no proper place for a young lady in a strange man's bed. "I wouldn't sleep in a strange bed," said she, "not if you gave me a basketful of monkeys."

For an hour that morning Dicky sat sketching a profile of Miss Cornish in charcoal—her profile as he



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had watched it in the light of the fire the night before.

When it was done he held it up for Fanny to see.

"Oh, Mr. Furlong!" she exclaimed, "you 'ave got a 'ead on you!"

"It's like her, Fanny?"

"I'd know it at once. 'Ow you must 'ave looked at 'er. I wouldn't take that amount of trouble."

She stopped as a knock fell on the studio door. She looked at Dicky, Dicky at her; both guessing and from their different instincts who it was—Fanny because she had summed up Miss Cornish and knew what women will do; Dicky because he had guessed what had happened.

"Come in," he called out, and neither of them showed surprise when Fanny Cornish's head appeared above the stairs.

"Well?" said Dicky.

"The sack," said she, and leaning on the bannisters she burst into tears.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was nothing for it but to repeat their experience of the night before. Certainly there were the uncle and aunt in Brixton. But theirs was a sanctimonious outlook on life which harmonised none too well with Fanny Cornish.

"I'm not going to be compelled to go to church on Sunday," said she. "They can try and find out where I am if they like—they won't succeed."



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"Oh, you'll marry one of these days," said Dicky; yet, infatuated as he knew he was fast becoming, he had no inclination to ask her himself.

"Marry?" she exclaimed. "I'm not going to marry yet awhile. I'm only twenty. I'm going to enjoy myself first."

When he asked her what her idea of enjoyment was, she seemed quite incapable of giving a satisfactory answer.

"Oh—going about," she replied. But what did that mean?

He made a bargain with her. She could have his bed, as she had the night before, until such time as she got other work to do. She should share his meals—such as they were—if he might paint her portrait.

"You don't give away much for nothing, do you?" said she with a laugh.

Dicky felt the blood stinging sensitively in his cheeks. He supposed he had been mean. He would have had to pay a model; she was only receiving the comfort of his bed, which he must have offered her in any case.

This was management again. She intended that the obligation should not be on her side.

Mrs. Samby, hearing that remark of hers, muttered, "Mean little cat," below her breath. Of course, it was nothing to do with her if Mister Dicky liked to give up his bed in that quixotically generous way; but she did not relish the idea of giving tea to that young woman every morning. A woman is



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never too old to be jealous; nor a man, for that matter.

She took a cloth and rubbed the dust off the easel in the middle of the room, as though her intention was to polish it. "Mean little cat," she muttered again.

And all this time Dicky was standing there in front of Fanny Cornish, wondering if he were mean at heart; wondering what had induced him to drive a bargain with a woman.

"I don't mean that you can't stay here," said he, "if you don't sit for me. Damn it—you haven't got anywhere to go."

"Oh, don't think I haven't got friends," she replied with a jerk of her head. "I've no doubt I could find somewhere to go. You're not the only man who'd put me up."

"I don't suppose I am," said he; "but would they sleep on a couch like I did last night?"

She was quite aware that not one of them—the men she knew—would have done it. Even her best friend—one who had taken her to dinners and suppers and given her all the little brooches and bangles and trinkets that she wore—even he had once suggested that they should spend the week-end at an hotel in the country. His proposal had been quite obvious. The time had arrived, he thought, when it was quite reasonable for him to make it.

"I'll come," said she, "if you'll let me have a separate room, and understand that I'm to keep it to myself."



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But those conditions had not satisfied him. The little trip to the country had been postponed; had never come off, in fact. She had driven the bargain too hard for him.

And now, faced with the question which Dicky had put to her, she was unable to answer it with truth. There was only one thing to do—to laugh him out of it.

“Why—I’m not complaining,” said she. “Beggars can’t be choosers, can they? You’re quite right to get what you can. Besides, I should love to have my portrait painted. Will it be for the Academy? That’d be fine, if it was hung in the Academy—wouldn’t it? Fancy all the people I know coming round and seeing me in the Academy—what a lark. How are you going to do it? I’ve got a ripping evening dress—black—it’s quite new. Their dress-maker took an awful lot of pains over it for me.”

So she laughed him out of any answer to his question, yet left the impression that he had struck a bargain with which she had clinched, and underlying it all was the faint suggestion that the margin of profit was on his side.

She brought her belongings and the black dress along with her that afternoon.

“You go behind the curtains and put it on,” said he, “while I try and plan out a scheme.”

She disappeared for a time, while Dicky walked up and down the studio outside the curtains, thinking out the scale of colour, the key in which he was to paint the first serious portrait he had ever done. As



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she dressed behind the curtains she was wondering all the time what he thought as he heard the clothes she slipped off, the clothes she drew on, the hooks and eyes she fastened, and the little gasp of her breath as she tightened her corsets, catching the last hook in at her waist. But Dicky had never heard a sound.

She realised that when she came out and found him standing there in the middle of the room so rapt in thought that he did not even look up as she entered. And this was a disappointment to her. She felt it keenly. Indeed, she stood there tapping her foot on the ground, sucking her lips between her teeth, until he turned in her direction.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed involuntarily, for certainly he was impressed. She made the picture for him, standing there, simply, with arms loosely at her side. There was nothing wonderful of the dress-maker's art in the simplicity of that black dress. It was cut almost dangerously low. For one moment he thought of her protestations of virtue, and wondered at that; wondered at the anomaly it betrayed in her character as he believed he knew it to be. But this thought was only on the instant. His realisation of the picture there before him, the sudden excitement, knowing that it was the first portrait he had ever attempted seriously to do, caught him away from any thought but delight and admiration.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed again, "you look ripping! Absolutely, you look ripping!"

The half pallor of her cheeks—for she was not

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one of those girls who rouged; she had told him so—added an interest he was already spurred to pursue. Her dark hair, her warm lips against the pale skin; her big, dark eyes with their long lashes—it was just such a picture he knew he could make to arrest the imagination of anyone!

She stood there, smiling at last, sunning herself in the warmth of his obvious admiration. He crossed the studio to her side, and as he arranged a fold of her dress noticed the scent of a heavy languorous perfume in his nostrils. It seemed for the moment to swim in his head. When he stood up looking at her again an almost overwhelming desire to catch her, willing or not, in his arms, came over him.

He swallowed in his throat, turning away and driving the thought out of his mind. She never guessed what was the matter with him then. He had enough presence of mind to allow her no gratification of such a kind as that.

When he turned round to her again, his lips were set to a thin line. It was really his picture he was considering more than himself or her. Had he given way to that desire, he knew, well enough he thought, what her answer would have been. She would have turned away and never come into the studio again, shutting the door inevitably upon the work he saw in front of him.

"Have you got any ornaments you can wear?" he asked quietly, sure of himself when that moment had passed.

She went behind the curtains to hunt through her



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little collection of trinkets, returning a moment later with a jade necklace round her neck and a bangle of jade on her wrist. Against the background of that curtain of faded orange, the green at her neck, the green on her wrist struck out, an unexpected note of colour, leaping into his imagination. He almost saw the picture in its completion then, and, what was more to him at that moment of inception, knew at once the title he would give it.

In an instant all the vitality of creation rushed to sudden energy in his eyes. She had not seen him as yet like this, and felt her own little personality dwindling before his.

"Well, you've given me the name for it," he exclaimed in his enthusiasm.

"The name?"

"Yes—what I'm going to call it when it's done."

"What?"

"Jade—that's all; just—Jade."

Disappointment, almost humiliation, filled her eyes.

"Aren't you going to call it—a portrait of Miss Fanny Cornish?" she asked. "I thought they always did that at the Academy."

He looked bewildered.

"Why Cornish?" he enquired.

Then she remembered how she had told him that her name was Marshall. For the first time in their short acquaintance she grew confused—the blood burnt a colour in her cheeks. She knew her vanity had given her away.



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"Yes—I told you Marshall, at first," she said.

"But why?"

"Oh—I—I had my reasons."

"Didn't trust me, I suppose?"

He laughed aloud and she thought she could hate him then.

"Well—perhaps you were right," said he. "All men are the same, aren't they? Didn't you say that to me last night when I showed you that study of the nude? Well, Cornish or Marshall, it doesn't matter. Jade's the name for it. Now you stand there like that—I shan't want you for more than half an hour. I'm going to make a rough sketch in water colour."

She stood, never moving, for an hour. It was the first time in her life that any artist had painted her and vanity steeled her endurance. Only once did she speak in all those sixty minutes, and then to ask him whether he did not think she was like a certain well-known actress on the London stage.

"A lot of people I know say I am," said she.

"You're a good deal more like yourself," said he abruptly. She was content with that, and said no more till the hour had passed.

He had toned the faded orange of the background to a yellow-grey by the time the sketch was done. It was rough enough, and disappointed her. She looked for her features, the beauty which she knew was in her eyes, only to find that the whole face was a blur. But the scheme of colour which he alone had aimed for was complete. The dress was luminous in its blackness against that yellow-gray, and those notes of



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green upon her neck and wrist sang out in a strange discord, wonderfully resolved to perfect harmony.

"It's not going to be like that when it's finished, is it?" she asked.

"It's going to be as much like that as I can make it," said he, well knowing how in the sudden heat of creation, even in that rough unfinished sketch, he had done a beautiful thing.

But the finished portrait is the work of beauty, and has gone long since to its private owner in France. But I have that rough sketch in my possession still, and I would not part with it—as Mrs. Samby would say—for a basketful of monkeys.

"And now," said Dicky, as he put the sketch upon the easel—"a canvas, and a big 'un, too."

He dived his hands into his pockets. Only a few shillings were there. He looked about the room, thinking what picture he could part with best. After painful moments of selection he whipped up the study of the nude under his arm.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To sell this," said he, "and buy a canvas. When I come back we'll have some tea."

He was down the stairs in one bound in his excitement, slamming the door behind him. Then she took off her black gown, dressing herself again, wondering whether out of the two pounds that were her sole possession she might not have saved him from the necessity of selling his picture to buy the canvas for her portrait.



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"No, I don't see why I should," said she at last. "He can make his money—I can't."

Which was intensely practical, and certainly true. Indeed, the truth of it soon set her conscience at rest.

CHAPTER X

IN a week's time Dicky was fully aware that the situation had become impossible. Apart from the continual restraint it was necessary for him to put upon himself, which scarcely another man in a thousand would have done, there was not one of the fellows who came to his studio who believed the story he offered them.

In a society where marriages are seldom and a man's relations with his womenfolk are of the most inconsequent nature, it was scarcely to be expected that they should. They frankly said so. Even Gilder, displaying the mastery of tact, could not conceal the air of one who perfectly understood.

Whenever he came to the studio and, because of his interest in Dicky's work, this was most evenings in the week, he always inquired of Madame—and so addressed her when she was there.

They were antagonists from the first moment of meeting, partly because she recognised in him the friend who had described her as *demi-vierge*—which she did not understand, but took to be uncomplimentary—but mainly because she knew from his manner that he counted upon her being no better than most of the girls he knew.



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"You think I'm living with Dicky, don't you?" she said sharply one evening when they were left for a few moments alone.

He stretched out his hands in such fashion as he would have wished to be described as French, exclaiming, "Madame!" in a deprecatory manner that might have been construed to mean anything.

"You might just as well admit it," said she, "instead of calling me madam like that. I know what you mean."

He smiled with a charming self-conscious detachment, believing his manner capable of turning any woman from wrath.

"What can it have to do with me?" he asked.

"But you think it all the same, and I tell you now straight out—I don't!"

"Ah," said he, whereupon with all intention he looked wise and quite unintentionally made a wise remark.

"Then you ought to," said he.

She flamed up at that; talked of the sensuality of men in terms that were quite comically rhetorical. In various gestures, Gilder spread out his hands to everything she had to say.

"We are brutes," he remarked when she paused for words.

"Yes—that's it," said she; "you are—brutes!"

"What contempt you'd have for us," he suggested, "if we weren't."

All this was excellent preparation for her mind in answering Dicky when he was forced to his conclu-



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sion. She found that she knew exactly what to say to him.

He had borne it as long as he could; so long, in fact, as the portrait had been in the making. There came a day when that suggestive frock of hers, and the scent she always wore, which hung heavily on his senses, fell more oppressively on his conscious mind than the work at which he was engaged.

He had struggled for long against it. The portrait had held him first. Now only the finishing of it was needed on the canvas, and this he felt he could no longer do while she was there.

One morning he threw down his brushes, went to the tap over the sink, and drank a large draught of water. Then he asked her to come out for a walk in the Park.

"Aren't you going to work any more?" she asked.

"No, not to-day. I want some air—I must get out."

She was not one to sympathise with moods, having but little understanding for any except her own. But this had to be borne with. There was no sense in her staying in the studio alone. With a glance at the portrait—not as one looks at a picture, but as a woman regards herself in a mirror—she went behind the curtains, changed her dress, put on a hat and coat, declaring herself ready to accompany him.

When she came back she found him staring at his canvas, and was quick enough, though with little understanding, to see that his eyes were bright with tears.



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Had there been any sentiment in her she might have shown sympathy then. Moved instead solely by curiosity, she came up close to his side to make sure, and then asked him what was the matter.

"Nothing," said he; "nothing."

"Must be something—you've got tears in your eyes. What is it?"

"It's so damnable," he said, "that you can't get away from yourself. Come on—let's get out. It's not a bit of good my staying here looking at the beastly thing."

"But don't you think it's good?" she enquired.

"Yes, it's all right; but I can't get on with it. I'm tripping myself up—that's what I'm doing; come on."

She followed him in silence, bewildered, so far as her interest in him would allow her to think about it.

The year was drawing towards spring. March had come in like a lion. For the first few days of the month the wind had rattled the windows of the studio in their casements. But now, scarcely half-way through the month, the lion was lying down with the lamb, the sky was that dazzling blue of spring before the sun of summer has yet bleached it. There was not a rain cloud in the heavens; only those white-winged ships with sails full-bellied which so often as a child Dicky had watched pursuing their ceaseless voyages across the ocean of the sky.

As they entered Hyde Park from Marble Arch, the overwhelming beauty of the time of the year caught hold of Dicky's imagination. Climbing over



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the railings, and feeling the grass underneath his feet, he stood there drawing in one deep breath after another, with all his soul longing for the wide stretches of the country once again.

"What's the matter?" Fanny asked him. "Don't you feel well?"

Truly a joy of the day was in his heart, but, underlying it, that bitter disappointment in himself and his work, the impression, too, that he was a prisoner upon those unyielding London pavements, denied him the power to see anything amusing in what she said. He answered quite seriously that he was perfectly well, but did not trouble to explain more than that.

As they walked towards the Serpentine he could see that the elms were rusting red with bloom. Seen at a distance, over all the trees, that dim purple blush had fallen, the sign of buds in breaking. He knew so well the feelings the sight of that would arouse in his mind if he were in the country. Birds would be pairing, the first faint veil of green would be spread on all the hedges. His mind was chafing still against the thought of his imprisonment when a man passed by them and raised his hat to Fanny. She bowed and turned when he had gone. Then she stood still.

"Excuse me a minute, will you," said she; "there's a man I know. I haven't seen him for some time. I must speak to him for a second."

She hurried back, and Dicky saw that he was waiting for her. For a moment he wondered who the



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man might be, then fell to musing once again upon the colour of the willows by the mill, the light of the sun on the Avon, and all the country sights and sounds he knew so well.

With a rising and becoming colour in her cheeks, Fanny approached her friend.

"You were the last person I expected to see," she remarked. He stood looking at her silently with undisguised admiration. He was not a young man. Forty-five at least was his age and undisguised admiration was not so becoming in him as it might have been. But Fanny did not consider that. It was admiration, and it pleased her.

"Well," she continued, "it's months since we've seen each other—aren't you going to say something?"

"You look as pretty as ever," said he.

It was this type of compliment she appreciated. "How is it you're out here in the morning? Aren't you working at Gleeson and Mills?"

His eye strayed in the direction of Dicky as he asked the question. It was plain enough that he wanted to know everything. She told him everything there was to tell, with little embellishments, little reservations of her own. The story sounded quite well. She made it sufficiently convincing to him that she was still the creature of unassailable virtue he had known before. But, like Dicky, he realised the impossibility of the situation.

"Yes, that's all very splendid," said he. "But it can't go on. He's probably excited over his work

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just now, but as soon as that's over you'll see another side of him. These artists haven't got much sense of honour."

"He may not have a sense of honour," said she, "but I know how to manage him."

He frowned at that. He wondered whether she would care to manage him when the moment came and all the desire of her himself was reawakened in his mind, now that he learnt she was within the power of some other man.

"You'd better let me have a talk with you again," said he. "What are you doing this evening?"

"To-night, oh, Dicky goes to a model class. Are you going to take me to a theatre?"

"No—I can't do that. My wife's more jealous than ever she was. I daren't be seen about with anyone. Isn't there somewhere where we could——?"

"The studio," said she promptly. "Dicky'll be out for a couple of hours. Come to the studio at a quarter-past eight." She gave him the address. "He'll be gone out by then till ten o'clock."

He frowned again at the prospect of that, but, as she pointed out to him, no other place or opportunity seemed possible.

"I don't like coming to another man's rooms," said he.

"Very well," she replied, confident of the result. "We'd better give it up then." Still confident, she held out her hand to say good-bye.

He succumbed, as she knew he would.

"All right," said he; "I'll be there. We shan't be



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seen, anyhow. To-night then—quarter-past eight. God bless you."

By the time Fanny had returned to Dicky's side, he had forgotten the country. In a heat of jealousy he was wondering again who the man might be. She told him, with all apparent openness, all about him; just as she had told the other man who Dicky was, with the same embellishments, the same reservations.

His name was Crombie—Arthur Crombie. He was a married man. She had no hesitation in admitting that—but why should she? He was quite well off; had a motor car in which she had been driven—once, when his wife was out of town. He was fond of his wife; but she was a jealous woman. Fanny could just imagine the type she was. Indeed, once she had seen her, the day she had first met Crombie in Gleeson and Mills. He had accompanied her while she made her purchases. How had Fanny come to know him? She had served his wife. Their eyes had met across the counter. Dicky must know well enough the look in a man's face when he wants to speak to a woman.

They had not spoken then. But the next day he had come to the shop again. She had served him. Certainly, it had needed some contrivance on her part. He had spoken to her then; asked her out to dinner. He was a perfect stranger. She knew he was married, too. But if Dicky had tasted the food at Gleeson and Mills he would have been glad of a dinner anyhow.

"I and one of the other girls often used to go out

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in the evening down Regent Street," she said, "just to see if we could pick up somebody to give us a dinner."

"Did you ever succeed?"

"Lord, yes! Lots of times!"

"Did they expect nothing from you?"

"They might expect, they didn't get anything."

"A sort of highway robbery," suggested Dicky.

"I don't see that!" she exclaimed with annoyance, "they enjoyed themselves, being with us."

After this she was disposed to tell him no more of her little story, but with some persuasion he induced her to continue.

Crombie had taken her to dinner that evening in a little restaurant in Soho. Not much of a dinner; but he had wanted to be somewhere where it was quiet. He was a nice sort of man. He had told her at the time that she was doing a very foolish thing in coming out alone to dine with a man of whom she knew absolutely nothing. She was too pretty, he had told her, to take that sort of risk.

"Did he mean it was a risk with him?" asked Dicky.

"No—not with him. He was all right. He was speaking from what he knew of other men. Indeed, he was very nice to me. He gave me this."

She pointed to an expensive-looking little brooch she wore on her blouse.

"It's quite good," she said; "a jeweller told me it was worth fifteen pounds. So I say to myself I've always got that if the worst comes to the worst."



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"And did he want nothing in return?" asked Dicky.

"No; he was always begging me to keep straight. He asked me to kiss him once—that was all."

"Did you?"

"Yes—there was no harm in it."

"I thought he was fond of his wife."

She laughed aloud at his simplicity.

"Well—that doesn't say he isn't. Men do more than that and still swear they love their wives."

"Do they?" said Dicky. "Did you tell him about me and where you were living now?"

She shook her head. That was easier to do than to say no with complete conviction.

Now they were crossing the bridge over the Serpentine, and Dicky suddenly stood still.

"What is it?" she asked.

He just pointed with his hand to a man standing at the further end of the bridge. Before him, on the parapet, stood a little black and white terrier, which, against all its inclinations, the man was trying to persuade to leap into the water below. The wretched little dog was thrusting out its legs in an endeavour to keep away from the edge. They could see it was trembling in fear before the sight of the chasm in front of it. A few of those errand boys, who are always about when anything is happening, were standing by with gaping and grinning faces, waiting in eagerness for the plunge when it should come.

For one moment Dicky stood still, then with a bound hurried along the pavement.



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"What are you going to do?" Fanny called to him.

"Stop him," said he.

"He'll only make a scene," she cried.

"Damn the scene!" he exclaimed, and broke into a run across the bridge.

CHAPTER XI

THE man looked up. All the boys turned round, as Dicky came up to the little group. Everything in the manner of his approach was antagonistic. The boys nudged each other in anticipation of what was to follow; the man regarded him offensively as Dicky stopped by his side.

"What are you trying to do to that dog?" he demanded.

"With a little persuasion," the man replied with aggravating quietness, "'e's goin' to jump in the water."

"Do you call it persuasion to push the poor little beast? It's doing its utmost to keep away from it."

"There's a lot of things we keeps away from as is very good for us, and a lot o' things some of us meddles with as 'as no concern with us at all."

"It concerns me if I see an animal being ill-treated," said Dicky, and found in the sudden rising of his anger that the words stammered awkwardly on his lips. Until that moment he had believed he had complete control of his temper. But never since his fight with Wilfred Leggatt had it been tested un-



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til now. He was surprised to feel a trembling within himself; surprised to hear the stammering of the words as he spoke.

"'O's ill-treatin' the dog?" the man demanded. He took no pains to hide his resentment of this interference, but was yet well within himself.

"You are," stuttered Dicky, "even if you only pretend to push the little beast in. You're frightening it out of its wits."

By now his cheeks were white. All colour of the blood below the skin had left his face. From the little distance at which she stood, sick in apprehension of the scene that might take place, Fanny could see a light in his eye that amazed her. He looked like murder.

"I'm not pretendin' to push 'im in," said the man.

"Not pretending? What *are* you doing then?"

"There ain't no pretence; I'm damn well goin' to push it in. It'll teach 'im to swim."

"By God, you're not!" Dicky shouted; but his sudden rush to secure the little beast was too late. A sprawling mass of black and white shot forward over the parapet and disappeared into the water below. In silence they all listened for the splash. With one accord all looked over. The dog was swimming wildly to the path that skirts the water below.

Then they stood up, the man with a grin of triumph in his face, which a swinging blow from Dicky's fist absolutely obliterated. He staggered back against the bridge, while trembling in every



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limb, that look of murder now blazing in his eyes, Dicky waited for him to recover.

The errand boys danced with glee. From out of nowhere came that everlasting crowd, without which no justice in this city can ever be done in peace and full completion. In the distance, Fanny turned her back and hurried away.

"It's nothing to do with me," she kept on saying to herself; "if he likes to make a fool of himself, it's nothing to do with me."

But the errand boys did not think he was making a fool of himself. That first blow, delivered in all ignorance of what the strength of a punch might be, was yet full of the power of almost murderous intent. Whatever might happen as the ultimate issue, that blow for the moment proclaimed Dicky the superior man, and the crowd is forever on the side of God, if not of His angels. Moreover, to the errand boys who had seen the affair from the beginning, and were swiftly spreading the story about, there was something in the nature of chivalry for a man to implicate himself in such a mess, and all for the sake of a dog.

"Go it, gov'ner!" they yelled; "'it 'im again. 'E can take two or three o' them." And they were all ready at a moment's notice to set to their heels if the man resented their remarks.

But neither he nor Dicky heard a word. There was in both their minds some other purpose to fulfil. A little unsteadily, still smarting under that blow, the man squared up to Dicky with his left fist out, his right in readiness to guard another blow.



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In an instant the feelings of the crowd had veered to him. Here was a man who knew what boxing was. He shaped like one who had seen his opponent in the ring, who knew where a blow might come, and, with that menacing left, knew where to deliver one.

But it was all the same to Dicky. It may possibly have flashed across his mind that in a matter of the gloves he was before a man who knew infinitely more about the business than did he. But he was not there to box. He was there to fight. There was this desire to kill, that only killing could appease.

He saw that outstretched left before him reaching towards his face, but, undismayed by it, slung out his fist again, right and left, right and left, a wild avalanche of blows with all his burning rage behind them. Not one of them got home, and, shaken all through him, he fell back from a steady punch that cut his lips and shot the hot blood into his mouth.

Now the crowd and the errand boys were laughing at him. Quickly enough they forgot that sense of chivalry, for the end of it was obvious enough to them. But it did not come so soon as any of them expected.

Again and again he rushed in on to that steady left, which never varied in its persistent tapping on his face. In a few moments one of his eyes swelled up and closed, the blood was pouring from his nostrils, drenching his shirt. Yet still that mad desire to kill was overwhelming in him. Sometimes he reached his man, when one or two in the crowd more intelligent in their sympathies would cheer him on.



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But his first was the only blow that could be said to have had effect.

And then it was plain to see the end was coming fast. A grey glaze stole over his eye. In his face they all could see how the desire to kill was battling with the bewildered knowledge that he was done.

One other blow and he would have been senseless at their feet. The man was waiting for his moment to deliver it when from an errand boy came a cry: "The coppers!" and the crowd vanished into thin air. Only one man remained behind, and he, with presence of mind, hailed a passing taxi. In another moment Dicky was bundled inside and, as he came up to the spot, the policeman stopped. With a critical eye he examined the splashes of blood on the ground.

"They've been fightin'—that's what they've been doin'," said the policeman aloud.

CHAPTER XII

DICKY had forgotten all existence of Fanny, and when he found her in the studio on his return could only remember with difficulty that she had been there at all.

Throwing himself in exhaustion down on the divan, where for some moments he seemed as though all consciousness had left him, he at last looked up and asked her what she had done, where she had gone to.

"I came back here," said she; "you didn't expect me to stay on and watch it—did you? Such a filthy,



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sight as that. You looked as though you wanted to murder him."

"So I did," said Dicky; "gladly I'd have killed him."

Almost there were tears in his voice. The bitterness of the defeat was slowly coming back to him. He was beginning to wish he had his chance all over again, thinking how he would have done this, how avoided that; gathering a swift experience even in those few moments that he had fought; exercising his intelligence to its utmost as though victory would have been the greatest thing in life.

But Fanny pouted her lips. She did not believe that, even though he had looked like it. To kill a man because he ill-treated a dog! No man would be such a fool. It was just the artistic exaggeration of his own feelings. He had worked himself up to believing that. Still, nevertheless, he had fought, and from what she could see had had a bad time of it.

In the back of her little feminine heart she admired him for that struggle, allowed he had plenty of courage, and, now that it was all over and she had not been inconvenienced by it, liked the idea of that exhibition of brute force.

In an effectual way she tried to minister to his wants, but only succeeded in irritating him. He was in no mood to be pitied for his wounds.

"But he must have knocked you about," said she; "look at your eye."

"Yes; he knocked me about right enough," said Dicky shortly. "He knew how to box and I didn't.

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He's made a fine mess of me—I know that. I got some in on him though. He won't ill-treat a dog again. The next man who stops him may be able to box as well as he can. Where's Fanny?"

"She went out just before you came in."

"What for?"

"To get a piece of raw meat, in case your eyes were hurt."

He grinned as well as his sores would let him. There was a woman with a practical mind, the sort of woman he felt he wanted at that moment.

When she came back she just gasped for one moment at the sight of him.

"Oh, dear; oh, dear!" said she, but that was all. From that moment she attended on him like a trained nurse, asking no questions. It was only when she got home to her husband that evening that she let herself go. They talked of nothing else. It recalled to Mr. Samby's mind all the fights he had ever seen, in and out of the ring. He gave her vivid descriptions of every one of them, and went to bed at half-past ten feeling he had had a jolly evening. For women are splendid creatures to tell these bloody stories to. Their eyes do get so full of wonder. By the time he had finished, Mr. Samby almost believed he was a fine upstanding man who, by reason of having seen so many fights himself, was quite capable of successfully participating in one. Indeed, as he undressed that night he regarded with no little degree of pleasure the slender muscle of his fore-arm.

While all these attentions of Mrs. Samby's were



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taking place, Fanny stood by making remarks which to the other Fanny were like pin-pricks in her blood.

"You won't be able to go out to the model class to-night, will you?" she asked when the red meat was securely bandaged over his eye. This really was the thought uppermost in her mind. She had been eager to ask it ever since he came back.

"Course 'e won't be able to go out to no class!" exclaimed Mrs. Samby.

"Oh, yes; I shall," said Dicky. "I'm half-way through a thing—I must finish it."

Mrs. Samby threw up her eyes and said no more. There was no more to say; his tone of voice had that determination in it which long ago she had learnt to understand.

But Fanny was not quite satisfied about the model class. By reason of the little arrangement she had made, she wanted to be perfectly sure, wherefore she pursued a method well known to her sex. Gently, but firmly, she told him he was in no fit condition to go out that night.

Had there been any doubt in his mind at all this convinced him. He swore that he was no puling infant. Mrs. Samby, in the corner of the studio putting on her bonnet and cape, knew well enough from the tone of his voice that he meant to go. She tossed her head and exclaimed, "Sch! sch!" several times below her breath as she listened to what she believed was the folly of Fanny's persuasions.

"I wish," she said to herself bitterly as she descended the stairs on her way home, "I wish"—and

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here, indeed, she cared not whether it were a Christian desire or not—"I wish that girl'ud get into some trouble, and then she'd soon find 'er place. Sleepin' there in 'is bed every night and tormentin' the poor boy."

She knew what she meant by this. Any other woman would have known as well. They have no opportunity to say these things except amongst themselves, and even then their conversation has not the full directness of their thoughts. A man would have expressed it differently and had the whole world to understand him. Dicky was to come to that frame of mind and soon.

But all that afternoon he lay on the divan, one eye closed from compulsion, the other by desire; and to Fanny, when she came in to make him some tea, seemed as though he were asleep.

She was more attentive, less egotistical to him that afternoon than she had ever been. Never were the sluggish instincts of sex in her so nearly roused as then. The sight of the blood on his face, the remembrance of that look in his eyes when he stood before that bully on the bridge; the mere thought that with all intent to kill he had flung himself into a fight—however incomprehensible the motive may have been to her—stirred her blood to quickness in her veins. She felt the insignificance of her own body, just as a man feels the insignificance of his before the birth of a child. A sensation of passionate passivity was continually trembling in her.

She found herself waiting on him with but little



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consideration for herself, until at last he began to notice it, too. He lay there on the divan watching her while she brought out the tea things, thinking how attractive she was and wondering what there could be wanting in her to make her truly a woman.

For now that he had slept, and the excitement of that morning had assumed its proper balance in his mind, his thoughts were gradually returning to the impossibility of their relationship. So as she moved about the studio and he watched her, it began to grow upon him that perhaps there was some humanity in her after all. And when, as once she passed by his side she laid her hand on his forehead, saying, "Poor old thing," he felt that perhaps all his judgment of her had been wrong. She was not one of those women who tormented men with their virtue. She *was* human. Her modesty had been human. Now her affection, when he was down, this was human, too. He had misunderstood her, that was all.

The next time she passed his side he held out his hand, and with that same sensation of passionate passivity thrilling through her she took it, pleased, flattered, yet in a sense as well made cold, as he dragged it to his lips and hotly kissed it.

"You mustn't be silly," she said; "I'd go to sleep again, if I were you, if you really do mean to go out to the class to-night."

"Yes; I'm going, right enough," said he, and though in that moment he had been repulsed, he still felt that he had misunderstood her.

She watched him critically as the evening drew on,



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preparing herself for disappointment if at the last moment he should change his mind. In such an event she had determined to go and wait in the street outside, in readiness to prevent Crombie from coming in. Her conscience was quite capable of appreciating the folly of asking another man to see her in Dicky's studio.

But when the time came Dicky took off his bandages, got his materials together, and put on his hat.

"I shall be back at half-past ten," said he, and took her hand. Beyond his control, his voice was charged with meaning. There was some determination in the sound of it which she dimly heard. Indeed, the fight that morning had revived the animal in him. He knew in himself that he was no longer going to be played with. Perhaps a dim realisation of that came to her mind as well. She looked at his swollen eye, his cut lip, and the red welts on his cheek, conscious of a little fear of him—a fear that was not actually unpleasant.

"Then if you'll give me your key," said she, "I'll be back before then. The housekeeper goes to bed at half-past nine, and I may go out. If you ring when you come back I shall hear you. I'll come down and let you in."

With a little reluctance he took the key out of his pocket.

"Not going out to find some man to take you to dinner, are you?" he asked, half seriously, but with a twinkle in his swollen eye.

She shook her head guiltily, but with no suspicion



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of guilt that he could see. Without looking at her again he hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

SHE had given Crombie full instructions where to come; to ring the street bell, to ask for Mr. Furlong's studio, to climb upstairs to the top floor and knock on the door that faced him at the top of the stairs.

A quarter of an hour must pass before she might expect that knock. A woman will best understand how she occupied that short space of time. For without the slightest feelings of affection, with a heart beating as peacefully as it would in sleep, a woman will yet make preparations for conquest. And such preparations as these need no explanation. Whatever issue she may have determined to fall out, the motive can be calculated to be the same.

Crombie, then, when he did knock and heard her voice admitting him, found her seated by the stove with a book in her hand, all those little preparations finished and done with, the faint odour of her perfume just suggesting refinement to his mind, the red of her lips against her pale cheeks, persuading his eyes to look at them.

For the first few moments indeed, he could look at nothing else. But presently, with an interest roused in what she was telling him about Dicky, he began to look about him.

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"Where's your bedroom?" he asked at last.

She pointed to the curtains.

"Behind there?"

"Not a room—just a bed."

"Where does he sleep then?"

"On that couch thing where you're sitting."

He moved uncomfortably. In fact for that first half-hour, he was obsessed with a feeling of discomfort, seeing her there in the rooms of a man he did not know. When she told him about the fight that had taken place that morning, he felt more uncomfortable still.

"They've got no control over themselves," said he, "these men with the artistic temperament."

And shortly after that he questioned her as to whether there were any chance of his returning. He was distinctly ill-at-ease. When she assured him that Dicky's work meant more to him than anything else on earth, that nothing could have persuaded him to give up his model class, he took off his gloves with a breath of relief.

"Is he any good as an artist?" he asked.

Instead of making any reply to that, self-pride inducing her to a thing she must have known she had no right to do, she went to the easel that was standing up against the wall and faced it round his way.

Crombie stood looking at the portrait in amazement. Not only was it her, living, almost breathing there before him, not only was it her with all her pretty effectiveness concealing none of the little meanesses of her character or hiding that want of human-



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ity in her which Dicky, evidently as well as he, had seen, but it was a picture. With the black figure against that mustard grey and the spurt of green from her necklace and her wrist, it was something to arrest the interest of anyone.

"That's his work?" said he, proclaiming the obvious as one is apt to do in moments of sudden amazement.

She nodded her head.

"He's by way of being a genius then," said he.

She looked at the picture with a new light in her eyes. This mere opinion of an outsider could convince her more readily than all the personality of Dicky himself. She was ever more impressed by what she heard than what she saw.

"You do really think it's good?"

He was no critic of art, just the ordinary man of ordinary appreciations, with a taste for pictures in his own home when they were not too expensive. Every year he went to the Academy, partly because it was necessary to be able to discuss it. But once there, he showed some idea of selection; did not necessarily like a Sargent because it was a Sargent, or even dislike it in order to be an exception.

But this was the first time he had ever been in an artist's studio; and here there were no everlasting rows of other pictures to distract the eye. Yet even in that poor light, and not quite finished as it was, he felt he was in the presence of something even more than unusual in its cleverness.

"Well—perhaps I'm all wrong," said he, as



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though the proper thing to have said was that it was bad, "but it seems a masterpiece to me—something right out of the ordinary. If that's not a fluke, this chap ought to do big things."

She listened attentively, trying in her little mind to grasp what big things might mean and drifting irresistibly into the consideration of what good it might ultimately be to her.

"How long have you been here with him like this?" asked Crombie.

"Little more than a week."

"Sleeping here every night on that bed, with him on that sofa thing?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say he's never made love to you?"

"Oh, yes—the very first evening I came here. But I soon put a stop to that."

Mr. Crombie frowned, diving his hands deeply into his pockets. He knew the world very well; that is to say he knew what he himself would do with the opportunities that the world seemed to offer to everyone but him. From beneath his brows, he watched her sitting there, considered how attractive she was; had no doubt whatsoever in his mind how it would all end and felt the sting of envy smarting in his blood when he thought that some other man would claim what he dared not secure for himself. It was a maddening thought, jealous and overbearing in him.

"I said I was going to have a little talk with you



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about this," he said, suddenly. "You know what I've advised you all along. You're much too good and sweet a thing to be spoilt like this."

"Indeed, I'm not spoilt," said she, with some asperity.

"No—but you never know what inducements he may not offer."

"Inducements!" she threw back her head and laughed. "He's as poor as he can be."

Crombie allowed his eye to wander for a moment to the easel. The man who could do that would not remain poor for long. He thought that, but did not say it. It was just as well to let her be ignorant about that as long as she could.

"But you're playing with fire," said he.

For a moment he thought of pointing out to her how unfair it was to Dicky, but fearing that that might place Dicky in a somewhat complimentary light, he thought better of it.

"I'm going to make a suggestion to you," he said, suddenly and, crossing to her side, he laid his hands on her shoulder. "If I allow you five pounds a week to live upon, will you promise me that you'll go away from here and always keep straight?"

Tears were in his voice as he finished his sentence. It sounded so noble and so generous an offer that the very sentiment of it touched him. Indeed the generosity completely obliterated the real motive in his mind, yet he expressed that motive clearly when he added—"I couldn't bear to think of you as anything else but straight."

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Fanny looked at him in amazement. This was the noblest thing she had heard of in her life. Stretching out her fingers she touched his hand on her shoulder.

"You can't do that," she said, softly, "how long did you mean to do it for?"

He specified no time, but he knew how hard it was for girls in her position, even when they had employment. Five pounds would ensure her a home, nice rooms to go to. She need never want. On that even she could comfortably dress herself. Why did he make this magnanimous offer?

"Because, my dear child," said he, "I realise how many girls have been ruined, just for want of a little money to keep them going. Here in this place, with this fellow, whatever he may be like—I know men—your life's absolutely balancing on a thread. I want to see you out of it. And when you get comfortable little rooms of your own—sometimes I'll come along and you can give me tea—eh?"

"Five pounds a week," said she, "of course, I think it's the most generous thing I've ever heard of. You're the only man I've ever met who's not asked for something in return."

Now he took both her hands in his, his blood warm with a sense of proprietorship. It was all the satisfaction his vanity and his senses had the courage to need, that she should belong to him.

"Then you won't stop here, even to-night—will you?"

"Wouldn't it be fearfully rude to Dicky?" said



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she. "After all, he's put me up. I don't know where I should have gone if it hadn't been for him."

He looked at her critically.

"You can look," she said, "I don't mean anything but what I say—" and on that word her voice broke, catching in her throat to silence. They stood there in the centre of the studio with lips half parted, anticipation, wonder and apprehension in their eyes. The door into the street had slammed and far away in the lower regions of the house, they heard sounds of footsteps mounting the stairs.

"What's the time?" she whispered.

With fumbling fingers he hunted for his watch.

"Half past nine."

"It can't be him then—his class isn't over until half past ten. If anyone comes and knocks on the door, I sha'n't go and open it."

So there they stood, waiting, as one floor after another the footsteps mounted nearer and nearer.

"Don't make a sound," she whispered again.

"They can't see the light through the door."

"But mightn't they come in?" said he.

"Not if they don't hear anyone moving about. Now!"

The footsteps came to the door. But no sound of a knock fell on their ears. The door opened and above the floor of the studio rose Dicky's head, as he climbed the stairs into the room.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THEY were all bewildered, all confused. But with Dicky, who instantly recognised in Crombie, Fanny's friend of that morning in the Park, confusion gave way to a jealous resentment. In that mood his suspicions were quickly roused; but Fanny was quicker still with a ready invention to allay them.

"Dicky—I hope you don't mind," she began nervously. "You remember I met Mr. Crombie this morning in the Park. We met again this evening and then I thought you wouldn't mind him coming up here for a little while. There was absolutely nowhere else to go."

Crombie shuffled uneasily from one foot to another while this substitute for an introduction was taking place. His lips wore a gallant attempt at an easy smile, but all the time he was uncomfortably regarding Dicky's black eye which the raw meat had not succeeded in dispersing.

Here was a man who, if he was prepared to fight for the sake of a dog, would more than likely fight for a woman, especially one with whom Crombie assumed he must surely be in love. Still further elaborating the easiness of his smile, he shifted again on to the other foot and hoped, he said, that Dicky did not mind this intrusion.

"You've got a charming studio here," he added.

"Thank you," said Dicky, abruptly, recognising the emollient intended to be conveyed.



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"Why did you come back so soon?" asked Fanny. She felt that conversation had to be carried on at any cost to avert disaster.

"You didn't expect me, I suppose."

"Well—I was saying to Mr. Crombie just now that you oughtn't to have gone at all."

"Yes, she's just been telling me of your—er—your little *contretemps* this morning in the Park." This was so palpably untrue to Crombie that he felt it needed his support, and, like her, impressed with the necessity of keeping the conversation moving, he added, "It must have been an uncomfortable experience, I should think."

Dicky regarded him with a steady eye; wherefore, being a timid man in all encounters in life, he walked as casually as he could to the divan and picked up his hat, wondering in his heart, which was beating more violently than it had for some years, whether he was going to get out of that room with a whole skin.

Still Dicky stood and watched him while he held out his hand to Fanny. With all the effort of which he was capable, he was endeavouring to curb his haste to get to the door. The fight Dicky had had in the Park that morning could not have been nearly so uncomfortable as were those moments to Crombie then. He felt Dicky's eyes watching him as he moved. He wanted to run to the door and slam it behind him. "A scene," he whispered to himself, "would be so horrible." But he was really thinking of his skin.

"Well; good-night, Mr. Furlong," said he as he

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began that much-desired journey to the door. "I'm very glad to have met you."

"Thank you," said Dicky again, and with a sudden irresistible impulse of devilish humour let him almost reach the door when in a stentorian voice he shouted, "Stop!"

The effect was electrical. Crombie almost leapt out of the skin he had been so eager to save and with blanched cheeks stood there weak and trembling in every limb. For, careful though he had been to conceal that eagerness to be gone, Dicky had realised that the very blood was tingling with fear in his veins.

"What's the matter?" asked Fanny.

"Yes; what's—what's the matter?" asked Crombie with the words chattering through his teeth.

"Nothing—good-night," said Dicky, and throwing back his head he shouted with laughter till, seeing no point in being made so ridiculous, the little man opened the door quietly and slipped out.

"Thank God!" he continued to say all the way down the stairs—"I'm out of that all right." When once the hall door was closed behind him, he took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his forehead and went home.

Until the hall door slammed, Dicky continued in his laughter, lying back on the divan and holding his sides at the remembrance of Crombie's face as he had turned round.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at!" exclaimed Fanny, annoyed because the ridicule thrown upon her friend had thereby fallen on her as well and, being



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one whose self-consciousness hotly resented ridicule, she stood there in the middle of the room with the blood scorching her cheeks and her foot tapping on the floor.

"Don't you?" said Dicky; then, seeing her face, as suddenly his laughter stopped. "Who is this Crombie?" he asked.

"He's a friend of mine."

"Yes; I suppose that. But what's he doing up here? What does he want to see you alone for?"

"We wanted to talk. Why shouldn't he see me alone?"

Dicky rose from his seat and came towards her. He had begun the day with the realisation that their relationship together in that studio was impossible. Later in the day she had shown him some little sign of affection—just the laying of her hand on his head, but it had been more of a human touch in her than ever he had seen before. With almost a woman's instinct he had felt that passion of passivity in her all the afternoon, and when he had gone off to his class had known in his heart that that night was to see some change in the attitudes of both of them.

Whether this determination was sensual or not he had not argued to himself. The question of taking advantage of her—that, in any case, no longer existed in his thoughts. No woman under the circumstances could, or should, expect things to continue as they were. She probably thought he was a fool. All that evening, therefore, as he tried to



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finish his work, he was determined to be a fool no longer.

Something was wanting in his life during those lonely days in the Ridinghouse Street studio, and she had filled a need, however poor a one it may have been. She stirred him to emotion, and in those moments he did not stop to determine how debased or how exalted it might be.

If there were anything he considered at all it was his work. As things were it was impossible for him to finish the portrait. He was not in love with her; but infatuation blinded him to the fact that there was nothing in her to love; probably the worst effect a woman could have had on him, or, for that matter, on any man. He burned under its stimulation, but it was not a stimulation to work. Yet chafing under her influence, which he knew affected the lowest of his nature, he still had played with the fire of it and now was determined that one way or another it should end.

It may possibly be said that this incident of Fanny Cornish in the life of Richard Furlong might well have been omitted from this chronicle. Yet I have not been concerned with making a hero, but of relating the life of the man in all those aspects which are to be seen in the life of everyone. Fanny Cornish was only an incident, and not a happy one at that. But she is a link in the chain which it is my endeavour to unfold. And those who would understand that last great tragedy of his life must learn of all the little incidents by which, definitely or indefinitely, he approached it.



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She must have known that night that circumstance was strained to breaking-point. For the whole of that day his manner had been strange, and then the fight, and now this finding of Crombie alone with her, all warned her ready instinct that some climax was at hand.

She stood there in the middle of the studio, watching him as he rose from the divan and crossed the floor to her side.

"We've had enough of this," said he; "you and I."

"What do you mean—enough?"

"Hasn't it struck you that your sleeping here every night in the studio—you in my bed, I on that confounded couch; hasn't it struck you at all that it couldn't go on for long?"

"I never meant it to go on for long," said she.

"Oh, you didn't? Neither did I. I'm not less human than anybody else. There's not a single fellow who comes up to this studio but what he believes we're living together."

"I know that," she replied. "I've put up with that."

"Well, you're not going to put up with it any longer," he said gently.

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"It's going to be true," said he.

She laughed nervously. Her lips were thin in fear of him. She could see the laugh had brought no conviction to his mind. With a sudden change of front then, she whipped herself into anger and contempt. If the five pounds a week which Crombie

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had promised her were to be justly earned—and, in fairness to her, it must be said she would not have taken it otherwise—she had to struggle for it then. Contempt and anger, these she realised were the only weapons with which to meet that passionate determination in his eyes.

Yet even then, in that swift moment, she had made debate. He did not intend to marry her now; but if she were clever, might not the day come when he would? Crombie had said he was going to be a great artist, that even the portrait he had done of her was a masterpiece. Which, then, was the better thing to choose? The moment was too swift for it to be determined on. She flung forth her contempt in quick defence, waiting the moment still when she might make selection.

"Oh; you think it's going to be true—do you?" she exclaimed. "That's what you've been expecting of me all this time?"

"I've expected nothing," said Dicky. "It 'ud be quite futile to expect anything from a woman. But this is what you might have expected from me. Men are more reliable in these matters. You can count on just how human they're going to be; you can estimate pretty accurately just how much they can stand and how much they can't. There's the true position. I haven't forced it on you. You were free to accept or refuse it after that first night here when you fainted and had to stay. I take it you knew what you were risking when you did stay on after that?"



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"So all this so-called hospitality has been offered me for a price?" said she.

"No; not *offered* for a price, and it's not even hospitality so-called. It's just life; and it has its price without any question of offering."

"Oh; then what you mean is you're going to make me your mistress, apparently whether I like or not."

"No; not going to, but wish to; and not whether you like it or not. I'm not a damned scoundrel. It's only if you're willing."

"And this, I suppose, without any feeling of love at all!"

"If I were in love with you I should ask you to marry me."

"But you're not?"

"No."

The honesty of that confused her. So honest was it that a hope leaped into her heart.

"Supposing you did get to love me?" she asked, and dropped her voice to a softer tone.

"That's not for me to say," said he; "I can't count on these things any more than anyone else."

Then, it was, she weighed her issue and in the favour of Crombie's offer the scales declared. Foiled in her effort to extract a promise from him, she turned to her contempt once more.

"You're like every other single man I've ever met!" she cried. "For the dinners and theatres you've stood us, for the money you've spent on us, you expect us to give our souls to become your play-things; you expect us to sell our individuality, to risk,

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perhaps, as a result, a life of regret, months of mental agony and physical pain, and at the end to become a social outcast. Would you make yourself so cheap?"

She stood there breathless with her own rhetoric, convinced that she had made a fine defence of her sex. When Dicky then turned away and disappeared behind the curtains that shielded the bed, she felt an elation at the thought that she had humbled him to shame.

In another moment he returned.

"You're quite right," said he quietly. "I've given you my bed; for the last ten days we have slept together in the same room. I've had the odour of your seductive perfume in my nostrils; I've heard you dressing and undressing, awake and asleep; and now like all men, I've asked for the reward for the little it's cost me. You must only regard me as human, that's all; as no better than the rest."

He held out a half-sovereign in his hand. It was the last piece of money he had in the house.

"You'll want this," said he.

"What for?"

"Well, you'll want to go to an hotel to-night. You can get your things in the morning."

"Is there any reason," she faltered, "why I shouldn't stay here to-night and then take my things away in the morning?"

"I thought I'd explained that," said he.

In one last effort to preserve it, feeling that her



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dignity was gone, she got her hat and without another word went down the stairs.

Dicky laid the half-sovereign on the table, flung off his clothes, and got into bed. With a dazed mind he lay watching the light of the stove as it half-flickered on the ceiling.

And down at the bottom of the stairs, with her hand on the handle of the door, Fanny was wondering where she could go. There was Euston Station that she had talked about so easily that night when first they had met. But she had never really intended going there. In fact, it was a lie when she said she had been there before.

Now it seemed the only alternative—unless—unless. She turned and began slowly to ascend the stairs again. Why should he turn her out like this? It was only right that he should have given her that half-sovereign. He could not expect her to sleep out in the streets. She found herself at the door of the studio. Before she was aware she had done it, she had knocked.

"Come in," said Dicky.

The studio was in darkness.

"Are you in bed?" she asked.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I don't know where I can go," she said.

"The money's on the table," said Dicky.

She crept across to it, feeling about the surface with her hand. When it touched the half-sovereign her fingers closed upon it eagerly.

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"Good-night," said she as she reached the door again.

"Good-night," said Dicky, and counted her footsteps down the stairs until they fell into the silence of the house. Then the hall door slammed.

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning Dicky awoke with the uncomfortable sensation that something had happened. Mrs. Samby was standing beside his bed with a cup of tea.

"You don't mean to say you've got rid of her," she asked as soon as his eyes were opened. He nodded his head. "My waird!" said she, "What a bit o' luck. However did you manage it, Mr. Furlong?"

Dicky sat up in bed and took his cup of tea.

"I asked her to go."

"I bet she was wild," said Fanny, overjoyed in her heart; "she could be wild, that girl, if she liked; as wild as a jessie-cat."

He sipped his tea, sitting there, smitten in his conscience, abusing himself and his sex in a long, mumbling dissertation which to Fanny was half of it Greek.

But she caught the drift of his thoughts. It would, indeed, have needed but little instinct from anyone to have guessed what had happened the night before. In her mental construction of it, Fanny had



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no pity for her sex; besides which, she had the comparison of the two—of Fanny Cornish and Dicky Furlong, of whom she would believe no wrong.

"We're a rotten lot, Fanny," said Dicky in conclusion.

"Indeed, you be'aved very well to 'er, sir. She deserved all she got, comin' up 'ere and takin' your bed. Thank goodness, she went last night, so you could 'ave a proper sleep after that beastly set-to you 'ad yesterday mornin'."

"No; I didn't behave rightly, Fanny."

"'Ow's that, sir?"

"I didn't fall in love with her."

"Thanks be to God you didn't," said she. "She'd 'ave led you a nice dance, that girl, if you'd married 'er."

"Well, she's straight enough. There are not many girls as straight as she is."

"Straight!" Fanny turned away in contempt. This was a subject that made her feel confused; but, at the same time, she had much to say about it. "I don't call it straight comin' up 'ere and sleepin' alone with you—puttin' on those low-necked things she wore to 'ave 'er portrait done, soakin' 'erself with scent and titivating 'erself like she did. I've seen a good many crooked things straighter than that."

Dicky smiled at her determined antagonism, but in no manner was his conscience eased by it. The fault, as he had said, was that he had not fallen in love with her. As he sat up there in bed nursing his knees, he wondered whether the emotion of loving

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had gone from him, whether only the sensual desire remained. More in honour than unfaithfulness to his memory of Constance, he felt the longing in the whole of his nature for the impetus of that deep emotion once again.

She had taught him that at least, this unlovable girl who had come in and out of his life in such sudden manner as a star shoots out across a September sky. The mere emotions of the man, he had learnt, were as ashes on the tongue without the quality of affection.

Then why had this whole year and more gone by, when all such impetus seemed dead in him? Was he never to love again and, if never to love, could he ever work again as he had worked for Constance?

He pulled aside the curtain on its pole.

"Fanny," said he, "turn the portrait round."

She turned the easel till the canvas faced his way. There was better work there than he had ever done as yet. But, my God! How much better than that might it not have been if he had loved her in her black dress and her jade!

"Fanny!" he exclaimed abruptly, "if my wife were alive now I shouldn't be lying in bed thinking about work, wondering whether it were good or bad."

"No, sir."

"No; I should be out of bed and doing it."

"Yes, sir," said Fanny; "shall I get your shaving water?"



BOOK III

CHAPTER I

JADE" was refused by the Royal Academy. Fanny Cornish never had the satisfaction of seeing herself on the walls of Burlington House. But in the Paris Salon it was the picture of its year.

Beside the brilliant colouring of the French painters, their daring technique, their startling composition, this portrait of Fanny Cornish, with all its quietness of tone, its silent strength of treatment, its characterisation and its masterly simplicity, compelled the admiration of everyone.

No picture of that year in the Salon in the scheme of which a note of green was struck at all, conveyed so much the real spirit of the colour as did those flecks of paint on the neck, that touch of it on the wrist of Fanny Cornish. He had named the portrait well; as, indeed, he named all his pictures. Yet though the eye first sped to those points of green, it did not there arrest itself. The face of the woman it was which held all those who saw it. In men the recognition came of that inscrutable something, the unassailable element in the sex against which their



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own sex is forever warring to the end. But it was in women that appreciation was most keen of all.

Women are ever fearful, yet ever attracted by the man who understands them. Here was a woman—rather, here was something in all women—which some man had understood; and whether that comprehension in Dicky was conscious or not, this it was, combined with the perfection of colouring and the simplicity of line that made the beauty of his picture—"Jade."

I was never able to draw from him his opinion of women. I was never able to fathom how much he really did understand them or how much of it was only the astounding grasp he had of the thing he saw before his eye. Certainly, he had opportunity enough to know them. The episodes in these volumes which relate to women are only those which seem to have had a definite influence upon his life and his work. Yet, if from this it would suggest that Dicky was what is known as a woman's man, no impression could be more at variance with the truth. Beyond his attractiveness to them, and their undoubted effect upon him, there were in Dicky none of those little characteristics, the power of anticipating her wants, of ministering to her vanities, which go to make that none-too-enviable type.

Indeed, Dicky's treatment of women was never conscious or prepared. His mind was too healthy for the subtleties of life, as it was also for the subtler subtleties of his art. After he had passed that phase of wanting to look an artist because it was his ambi-



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tion to be one, Dicky had developed into a man of whom, at first sight, one would never suspect the great ideals or the imaginative nature within.

In the first place, he was healthy and robust to look at; not heavy in figure, but strong-shouldered, easily built, and with such muscular development as I have seldom seen in one who took no pains to cultivate it.

It was no doubt from his youth that love of the country and the open air which had bred such health into him as no continuous work in London studios could ever destroy. Only in times of sickness, which were seldom with him, have I ever seen the glow of health go from his face. The oily atmosphere of the studio never dispelled it.

This, you might well say, was scarcely the type to make an artist of such ambition as Richard Furlong. But there was in him that nervous imagination, the birth of which always to me seems to trace back to that first day with which this chronicle commences. And, in addition to this, was all that love of beauty and gentleness of spirit he had inherited from Christina, his mother.

He was too normal for eccentricities of manner or of dress. Indeed, the greatness of his imagination lay in seeing life—not as he alone could see it, but as we all see it, without that energy of mind to think how beautiful it is. Nor was he a man who regarded but one aspect of it. The broad variety of his subjects prove how infinitely versatile he was. I have heard him, standing before his easel, talking

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seriously with Mrs. Samby, and learning from her opinion of his work some new point of view with which to regard it. Truly, his genius lay in his simplicity. He was always the same to all men. His greatest success never turned his head or altered his opinion of anyone. It was only his love of a woman which swept him towards the failure he so narrowly averted.

On the highest wave of his popularity, when all Society in London was beckoning him to its doors, I remember him going down to Notting Hill and visiting Mrs. Samby, who was dying. He sat beside her bed, talking to her for an hour or more, bringing the old laughter back into her eyes as he reminded her of their days in the Ridinghouse Street studio.

The acceptance of "Jade" in the Salon was another turning-point, not only in his career, but in his life. To an invitation that he received from a society of painters, he went over to Paris. There he was dined by them at the Café Baudelaire, one of the many *cafés* that have come and gone in the neighbourhood of Montmartre. In a week's time, having seen enough of the galleries to stimulate his desire to visit every gallery in Europe, he came back to London ready to make his preparations at once to set off.

This, though he had never realised it before, was what he had needed most of all; and, once having tasted the joy of travelling, he would have gone barefooted across the breadth of Europe had it been necessary. Fortunately for him, however, commissions came tumbling in upon him from the moment



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"Jade" was acclaimed with all the honours it so justly deserved. He had money enough now to go abroad, and, letting his studio, he gathered together all that he considered necessary for a journey of two months, but did not see England again for two years.

Of those two years I can write nothing but what I heard, and Dicky was ever reticent about himself, if not reticent about his work. He did not tell me much. Every gallery on the Continent which contained pictures by artists of any note at all, he seems to have visited in that time. I have seen his sketch-book and the copies of pictures that he made; his sketch-books alone filling a large case which he had shipped home by sea from Genoa. They are crowded with notes and drawings from the work of every artist I have ever heard of.

In those two years he made himself intimate with almost every phase of art since the Renaissance, and the broadening effect it had upon his own outlook was just what might have been expected. Simple and direct as he had always been, it seemed with this greater knowledge of the work of other men his self-simplicity was not impeded, but developed almost beyond belief. After those two years he returned to London, a man who recognised the path that lay before him, and knew as surely as he saw the light of day where it would lead if he could follow it aright.

It was only by slow degrees, here and there a story, sometimes from his own lips, sometimes told to me by those who had met him when he was abroad, that I learnt of his adventures during those



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two years. He was not one to pass through life without them; yet, so disjointed are these stories, that I can construct no consecutive history of all he did.

The records of his sketch-books, these show the various journeys that he made and, with the dates attached to every little drawing prove the order of the places that he visited. To look at them, estimating the work they represent, it is difficult to imagine how he found time for any adventures at all.

Yet in Antwerp there was a model they called *Sotte Jean*. Her name is written below many of the draped and undraped sketches in his sketch-books. He only spoke of her as "an extraordinary girl, full of unselfishness, and with no more moral sense than a rabbit." But I have heard since from one of the men who was studying in Antwerp at the time, that she kept house for him, following him into Germany, even accompanying him when on foot he made his way down south into Italy.

In Italy she left him. There, falling in with a French art student, she went back to Paris. After Milan, she does not appear in his sketch-books again.

Whether his pride were hurt or he suffered in any way from this desertion, it is impossible to discover. But for the student in Antwerp, I should never have heard so much of the story as I did. I doubt, indeed, if the matter were a serious one, for such relationships between artists and their models are common and transitory enough. Yet I have never known Dicky involved in any affair with a woman when he



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did not take it seriously, more or less. There was the blood of the Puritan in him, derived unmistakably from his father, which, while it was not so powerful as his environment, yet inclined him to take extreme views of every situation in which he found himself.

In Athens, he spent a week in the common offenders' prison for assault, having belaboured a man for cruelty to his horse. On this occasion it would seem he got the best of it, and passed his week cheerfully, nursing the satisfaction of having thoroughly chastised his man. In Naples, he found himself mixed up in a brawl in a sailors' tavern, was knifed in the shoulder, and from his account of it, seems lucky to have escaped with his life. Notwithstanding this, he mixed much with the sailors in every seaport town he went to; for a sailor's life had always great fascination for him. I have no doubt this interest was fostered in his mind during that period when, with Monsieur and Madame Marco, he lived in Greenwich.

While in Venice he made many sketches of ships in the Giudecca Canal and in Marseilles, though there were no pictures to be seen there at all, he stayed the greater part of three weeks, spending all his time in the *cafés* on the quayside in which all the flotsam and jetsam of the sea-going world is forever being cast and by the sea forever being swept away again.

It would be impossible to estimate the value of those two years to Dicky. They completed his edu-



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cation in the history of art; they went far to completing his education in life itself. I saw him in London the day after his return, and in a few moments he made one aware of the improvement in him. Wider interests and that greater experience had developed his mind, increasing his powers of originality. In those two years he had learnt to place himself, to fix before his eyes that star of his ambition which in time was to fall away and yet in time again before the end, be raised up to its highest point of all.

To a summons from Mr. Nibbs which he received in Paris, telling him that Mrs. Baldwin was dying, he returned to London at once. She had fallen down the stairs from the sitting-room into the shop and, besides the breaking of her leg, had in some way strained herself internally. A younger woman might have lived, but the doctor had little hope of Mrs. Baldwin.

With that same fear of meeting his son, though tempered now by the instinct of curiosity, Dicky came once more to the oil-shop in Drury Lane. As he crossed the threshold, the very first sight that met his eyes was a little boy in a blue jersey and blue knickerbockers, fair-haired, blue eyes, little socks that left bare his legs to the knees. He was sitting on a butter barrel, kicking his heels against the tub, watching the business of the shop which in Mrs. Baldwin's absence, according to a notice in the window, was being carried on as usual.

Dicky stopped in the doorway to look at him,



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when the blue eyes were fixed steadily on his and the pair of heels slowly stopped their kicking on the tub. Those were his own eyes regarding him. There, too, was the very expression he had often seen in the face of Constance when she would gaze at him, half in wonder, half in comprehension. Some emotion, easily accountable perhaps, rose in his throat. The emptiness of his heart in these last three years was in that sudden moment swept away. He had wondered if the deeper emotion of love would ever be possible in him again. Now he knew that it was still there, waiting only for the living hand to touch it into life. For even then, in his son's eyes, the dead hand of Constance had stirred it to consciousness in his mind.

"What's your name, young man?" he asked at last, when the look of wonder in those blue eyes had grown into embarrassment.

"Harry Furlong."

Even though he knew who it was, the sound of his own name in that lisping voice stirred the emotion still deeper within him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Lookin' after the shop till the man comes down from Granny."

"What man?"

"The doctor. She fell downstairs and hurted herself. She bleded."

"Do you know who I am?"

A pair of big eyes searched him from head to foot.

"No."

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"Have you ever heard of your Daddy?"

"Yes."

"What's he like?"

"He's a big man and he paints wif a lot of likkle brushes."

Dicky laughed; took him by his arms and lifted him high off the butter barrel, standing him down on the floor in front of him.

"What do you mean by little brushes?" he asked.

It was explained to him that the only brushes they sold in the oil-shop there in Drury Lane were such as were used by men who painted houses with paints out of big pots. His father's brushes were smaller than those.

"Who told you all this?"

"Granny and Mr. Nibbs."

"Would you like to see your Daddy?"

"Not going to leave Granny," said he and thrust a foot forward, jerking back his head with all intention of showing his powers of resistance if it so happened that Dicky had come to take him away.

A disquieting sense of apprehension rose in Dicky's heart. If Mrs. Baldwin died, what was to become of him? It was his home, this oil-shop, with the same odours of paraffin and soap which brought back all the remembrances of Constance. And there stood her son with the same fearless look in his eyes, the same generous expression on his lips.

"Aren't you fond of your Daddy?" Dicky asked, feeling ill-at-ease in his conscience when he thought how late that question had come from him.



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"Never seen him," said Harry.

"How would you like to go with him into the country where there are rivers and trees and lots of grass to run about on—apple trees with apples growing on them? How would you like that?"

"Never seen him," he repeated, unmoved by these prospects which offered a companion whom he had not learnt to care about.

"Shall I tell you a great secret?" said Dicky.

Harry nodded his head in eager response to that. Secrets were always worth hearing. Indeed, secrets, real ones, were the breath of life.

"I'm your Daddy."

Harry stood back and looked him up and down, passing Dicky under such examination as he devoutly hoped he would never be compelled to endure again. He felt the judgment of those two blue eyes were unerring. He knew that there he stood as near as ever in his life he could expect to stand before the inviolable justice of God. Had his own son turned from him then, it would have been a judgment he could not bear to face.

Nothing was to be said; nothing to be done. He merely waited. When the wonder in the boy's eyes turned to shyness, he knew that his ordeal was passed. Shyness then came over him. He tried to smile. Full of awkwardness, he put out his hand. Harry laid his little fingers in the palm of it.

"Do you paint wif likkle brushes?" he asked.

Dicky was holding him in his arms when the doc-

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tor came down the stairs. He was hurrying out of the shop as Dicky stopped him.

"You've been to see my mother-in-law," said he. "How is she? Can I go up and see her now?"

"You're Mr. Furlong?"

"Yes. Is she bad?"

The doctor lowered his voice.

"She may live till to-morrow. That's the best there is to be said of it."

CHAPTER II

MUCH strategy had to be employed to soften that first parting which death brought into Harry Furlong's life. Death is a word, so Dicky learnt, that is not spoken to young children.

"But he'd bear it," said Dicky, thinking of those eyes and remembering Constance.

"'Tain't no question of 'is bearin' it," said Emily. "'E wouldn't understand and it 'ud frighten 'im. Men don't know nothin' about children. All they thinks about is themselves and that everybody's like 'em."

Upon some wonderfully constructed story of her own, Emily sent him out to her house in the suburbs, moreover with the ultimate intention of keeping him there. She had, she said, done more for the child than ever Dicky had even contemplated. That was true enough. But from the moment he had seen young Harry kicking his heels against that butter-barrel in the shop, a new instinct had been awakened



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in Dicky, selfish as most of the instincts of men are liable to be, but excusable and certainly human.

He saw himself, as all men do, growing up to a new manhood in his son and it touched, not only his vanity, which was to be expected, but a deep reverence for life itself, a glowing appreciation of its possibilities. It was not that he had found his own limitations. Life was too young in him for that. But in this boy with his fair hair and his blue eyes, his frank and fearless expression, it was as though a clean canvas had been placed before him on the easel and on him devolved the responsibility of the portrait it should ultimately present.

But beside and deeper than all this, which was, after all, merely the outbreak of human egotism which all mothers so quickly recognise in the father of their sons, a warm and compelling love had awakened in Dicky for his child. His nature needed affection. Without it for these last three years, he had found life imperfect and himself ill-equipped to meet it. But here, in some form at least, it had discovered a means of expression. He had made up his mind to take young Harry down to the Mill and there, in the charge of Mrs. Flint, himself to watch him rising from childhood into youth, youth to manhood.

"The country," he declared, "is the only place for a boy. Teach him Nature first, before you teach him anything else. He can't learn Nature in cities. In cities all you find is what Nature can become. I want him to know the note of the thrush when it sings—



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to be able to mark a kestrel to her nest—to know the sign of an otter's pad when he sees it in the mud. Those are the things it's good for a boy to know. Once he gets them well into his heart, he can stand all that he sees in cities."

Responsibility was making a philosopher of Dicky. He took it seriously, but with a light heart, overjoyed at this new interest in life.

There were many things to remember when Mrs. Baldwin's funeral started from the oil-shop in Drury Lane and toiled slowly down the Harrow Road to Kensal Green. Dicky and Mr. Nibbs went alone, for Emily had stayed with the boy to keep his mind in occupation. They sat in the same type of closed and stuffy carriage as when they had passed down that endless road before, Mr. Nibbs nervously keeping up a senseless flow of conversation, knowing that Dicky's mind must be reverting to the day they buried Constance. So successfully did he talk, that indeed he destroyed the deeper bitterness of regret. Dicky's mind wandered to incidents of that journey. He recalled the face of the lady who had watched him from her carriage when, in the congestion of the traffic, they had waited side by side.

But as soon as the service was over, as soon as the spadefuls of earth were fast falling on the polished coffin, Dicky wandered off alone. He wanted to see the grave which he had never had the heart to look upon since that day when, with his mind unsteady in its balance, he had set out on his walk from Kensal Green to Gloucestershire.



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For a long while he stood there with mixed feelings of regret and pain and memories of love and of their wonderful days, of Constance herself, the noble creature that she was and all the sacrifices she had made for him.

"My dear," he whispered, "he shall be the man you would want him to be."

And then, for this was that very sentiment which they do so hate in England, the tears filled into his eyes. He smeared them away, still standing there, unable any longer to read the inscription on the little white cross—

Constance Furlong—wife of Richard Furlong—departed this life—and so on—in the twenty-first year—

Many were the casual readers of that inscription, knowing nothing of Constance, never having heard of Dicky who muttered: "Poor thing" as they passed on. And not a few amongst the women who had seen it, guessed how the thing had been.

CHAPTER III

HARRY was told that his Granny had gone away on business to buy more oil and candles for the shop and, in the new-found delight of having discovered a father who could tell him more magnificent stories than he had ever heard before, he was content with his journey to the Mill.

They sat in opposite corners of their third-class



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carriage all the way to Pershore, when Dicky played with his childhood, calling from his mind such spirit of invention as he scarcely dreamed had existed in him.

"Look at the trees racing up to London," said he, when once the country was reached. Whereupon it became imperative to say why they wanted to get to London and what they did when they got there, for there was not a sign of them in Drury Lane.

"They never do get quite to London," Dicky explained—"at least only a few of them. They're like the swallows, a lot of them die on the way, or they stop just outside and daren't go any further because of the smoke and the fog."

But what were swallows? To one born and bred in Drury Lane, it was a natural assumption enough to suppose that they were what you had in your throat when you were eating.

"Granny always used to say—don't swallow your food so kickly."

There was no little joy to Dicky in telling someone who knew nothing about them what swallows were. There he was just come from the South of France which was the half-way house of their yearly journeys. There was a whole fairy tale to be told of where the swallows came from every year and, warming to the delicious task of it, he told those wondering eyes a tale he had little imagined to have existed in his mind before.

All this sped the journey by, and quickly enough for them both; but one of them was not to see it out



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until the end. Dicky was beginning a long tale about a tailor who sat on his haunches in the window of his shop, making coats all day long for those people who laughed up their sleeves. It had endless possibilities of Romance, and though the blue eyes were eager enough at the start, in time the lids grew heavy. The fair head nodded into sleep, when Dicky took him on his knees, folding his arms about him and looking out of the window now in silence, wondering why he had not realised the joys of childhood before.

Then Pershore was reached. Dicky carried his son in his arms across to the old dog-cart that was ready in waiting at the station gate. All the way back to Eckington, never stirring as they bumped over the old bridge, Harry slept with no sign of waking, his little lips half parted as though already in wonder at the new life that lay before him.

It was spring again, but later in the year than when he had taken Fanny Cornish for her walk in the Park. The lilacs were in bloom, the tulips out and the daffodils just over. All the hedges had shot their spikes of green, the pollard willows that for months had looked so dead, were breaking into life.

With his sleeping burden in his arms, Dicky walked up the garden path, just as of old, Angel, the shepherd, had carried him, but to a sterner welcome than now. The door was closed. With some little difficulty, he freed a hand, rattling the old knocker as on the day when Anne had opened to him.

Now it was Mrs. Flint. He recognised the tread of her footsteps across the hall. Scarce a memory



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of the past was awakened in him by the sound. Pride only was uppermost in his mind. What would she think of his son? Much what he thought of him; what anyone would think. He looked at the sleeping face below him, seeing Constance again and looking eagerly for himself.

But in Mrs. Flint, as she crossed the hall and fumbled nervously with the latches and bolts of the big door—never unlocked in the day-time, unless to a visitor such as he—every memory was awake and pulsing in her then. Three years had gone since last she had seen him and in the quiet evenings in the Mill, when Mr. Furlong was reading aloud while she sewed, the work had often fallen from her hands as her thoughts wandered. In those moments she had supposed that love was quite still in her by now. A thought of Dicky brought a sense of kindness, of gentleness even to her heart. But it was no more than that. Sometimes she had smiled as she picked up her work again, thinking how easily love can fall into submission, taking its place amongst the patient memories of life.

But now, as she came to open the door to his knocking, all those beliefs were gone. She knew he was bringing his child, but even curiosity had not stirred in her as yet. The thought of seeing him again after these years of absence was setting her heart to a bewildering race in her breast. She felt it as though it were beating on the door to open it before those rusty bolts were shot from out their sockets. And when at last it swung open on its re-



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sisting hinges, there flooded the daylight into the hall and there stood the man she knew she loved as well as ever.

"I guessed it was you," she said on her breath, then, seeing his burden, exclaimed—"Dicky!" and was by his side in a moment. "Asleep? What a darling!" She looked up full into his eyes. "Your boy, Dicky."

"My boy," said he, with pride all satisfied in the tone of her voice alone. "What room's he going to be in? He'd better sleep as he is, hadn't he? No sense in undressing him now. It's a long journey for a little kid. The first he's taken, I believe."

She held out her arms, well aware of Dicky's instant of hesitation, but with no time for gratitude once the burden was a weight against her breast.

"He's to sleep in my room. I've made a little bed up for him. I'll take him up there now."

Dicky followed her upstairs, suggesting that possibly Harry might disturb her; hoping that he might be put in his room, yet feeling the matter was no longer in his hands. This was the way with women. There were certain things in life over which they claimed a monopoly. Rightly too perhaps. He remembered it even in Mrs. Collins, whose dead baby he had painted—his first commission—in Peabody Buildings. The picture of it, the sordid bedroom and that weeping woman rushed back into his mind, bringing with it a sickness of fear as he looked at Harry's head on Mrs. Flint's shoulder. He had realised the terror of death since then.



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The tidiness of Mrs. Flint's bedroom, the cosy little bed she had prepared for his boy drove the thought quickly enough away from him. Over her own bed was a sketch he had given her, framed by the local frame-maker in Pershore. There were three more of which he had no recollection, also framed and hanging on the walls.

He pointed to the one over the bed.

"I remember giving you that one," said he—"but where did you get the others?"

"You'd thrown them away. I—kept them."

He looked round the room, thinking of the numberless sketches he had cast aside, expecting to see more. There were none; but on her dressing-table, where she must see it every morning and every night stood a photograph of him that had been taken four years before in London.

Suddenly then, the full remembrance of everything returned to him with a confusion of thoughts and a swift embarrassment. He knew she still loved him. Those pictures, that photograph, they were silent proofs that love was no transitory thing to her. It was an assumption, but instinct it was and no conceit that made it. He would have given much to have avoided it. For this glance about her room was an insight to her mind. For three years in which so many things had happened to him she had lived here, silently keeping the secret in her own heart. Nothing had moved onwards in her life. This it was to be a woman. He felt the tragedy of it as though the silence itself accused him.

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'And she was not slow to catch the drift of thought in him. She laid Harry upon his bed, then came to Dicky's side, taking his arm with a gentle and reassuring hand.

"You're not going to be worried about me—are you?" said she. "I shall never make such a fool of myself again as I did that day. That's all over now."

There was bitterness in her voice, not for the truth, but because the moment needed that the lie were told.

"Come downstairs and see your father."

He took her shoulders and turned her face towards his. How deeply this thought of her constancy had touched him he did not pause to tell himself, nor that her lie had left some pain within.

"Are you happy here?" he asked.

"Absolutely," she replied, when he caught no note of wavering in her voice, or saw an instant's unsteadiness in her eye. Then it was true. It *was* all over. Three years had found an end of love. It *was* an assumption and his instinct was at fault.

"Absence often heals," said he, at which she must keep back a sudden leaping in her heart for the note of disappointment that she heard in him.

CHAPTER IV

THERE is a well-known saying to the effect of that eternal upspringing of hope in the human breast. For here again the situation was revived once more between Dicky and Mrs. Flint.



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Three years had gone by since the death of Constance and, ever in need of the love of a woman in his life, Dicky's heart was like a seed wintered in the earth, waiting for the first sun of spring to send forth its shoots in answer to the brighter light, the warmer atmosphere.

At the sight of those pictures on the walls, that photograph on the dressing-table, without conscious egotism or selfish delight, he had felt—as would have been human in anyone so much alone in the world as he—that here at least he was in the presence of love. Without one moment's desire to take advantage of it, the knowledge cheered him. Here indeed was someone in whom he might confide, might trust, might speak the very meaning of all his inmost thoughts, his most sacred ambitions. Reticence was in his nature when amongst men. But with women and those who loved him most of all, he could speak himself, without fear of confusion. Ever in need of sympathy and understanding, life had been swift to show him that it is amongst women these qualities are to be found.

Here then, in the very commencement of their second meeting, he first had been buoyed up with hopeful anticipation and then cast down because it seemed her love for him had wasted into nothingness. But selfishness and wounded pride, these were not the motives of that depression. He would, in all sincerity, have wished what had been happiest for her. It did not seem to him that he was worth a fruitless love of years, or was there that amazement



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in him, as comes to the minds of so many men, that women who have loved them once, can ever cease to love them still. It was just this, that in the loss of her affection, he must forego her deeper sympathy and lose her clearer understanding.

So then it was, that little note of bitterness, that leaped the sudden hope into her heart.

"Absence often heals," he had said, and like a forest beast that long has lost the scenting of its prey but, finding it again, Mrs. Flint could detect the hidden note of disappointment.

What then did it mean to her? That were a subtle matter to determine. First without doubt, it was a bounding hope that rose the colour in her cheeks and struck a brighter light into her eyes. He had come back again, the man she loved, embittered with the thought that her love for him was gone.

But once alone and in the silence of her room, beside that bed in which she had lain so many times awake to think upon the matters of her life, she found a slow mistrusting growing up behind her hope. He was distressed to find her love was gone, but did that mean that love of her had found its birth in him?

With a firm and steady will, she set herself in check. "Don't be a fool," she said, as countless times she had warned herself before. "He doesn't love you. He never would." Then in her mind, torturing herself with self-inflicted pain, she drew her picture of the woman who should be his mate. A fine creature she would be, so far unlike herself;



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beautiful to look upon, a mind to almost meet with his. She looked down at her hands, rough with the work about the Mill she had to do—those other hands would not be such as hers. She could see, as plainly as she saw her own, the slender fingers of the woman he would love. Smarting the pain still deeper, as though to heal them she would cauterise her wounds, she went to the mirror on the dressing-table and looked at her reflection there.

Now she smiled—a smile of bitterness indeed. The thought was too grotesque to imagine he should care for her. The picture she had drawn was far from its reflection in that glass. For now since his success, in that first moment when he came into the house, she had seen a striking change in Dicky. Success had brought him confidence; the light of command was in his eyes. He knew his worth as it had seemed he had not known of it before. Here was the man in him that any woman might be proud to win. No—she was not his mate. The light he needed in a woman's eyes, as windows to her soul, was not in hers. If only he could find the woman, meet his eyes with hers and know that in those eyes his destiny was fixed. Then these faint flickerings of hope might well die down in her and in the silence of her heart she might find some consoling peace in memory.

Such a woman she had seen. Of a sudden, recollection stirred in her. Her head lifted, as when the guardian of a herd thrusts up its nostrils to a suspicious wind. Such a woman she had seen that very

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day. At Woolas Hall the guests were gathered for the hunting. That morning as she walked up to the farm below the hill to make complaint about the milk they had received, the horses passed her on the road. One of them, a splendid bay, stepping with all the pride of horseflesh as when it is conscious of the rider on its back, carried a girl, not more than twenty-five years old. There was just such a woman as Mrs. Flint had pictured in her mind.

Health and energy were tingling in her cheeks as she rode through that crisp morning air. On either side of her, two men in scarlet coats were eagerly vying with each other to engage her in their conversation. Between them both, offering the favour of her attention no more to one than to the other, she rode with head thrown back to catch the sharp spring air upon her face. There was that amusement of a keen intelligence in her eyes, as though her laughter were ever ready to be fairly called. Indeed it seemed to lie in waiting at the corners of her mouth, just quaintly drooping in a humorous smile as though the comedy of life were always present in her thoughts and she had been born in the world to miss no moment of it as it came. It showed again in that fine chiselled outline of her nose, which slightly tilted to attractive humour once again, with nostrils not too closely set, lest but a hint of meanness should have spoilt the keen intellect and generous intention of her face.

Her humour and understanding was complete and deeper meaning of her



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nature was hidden in her lips, where, from those quaintly drooping corners of her mouth, they rose in warmth and fulness to the perfect arch revealing just the whiteness of her teeth.

This was the feature of her face on which the eyes of Mrs. Flint had rested. For there was consummated all the attraction of the woman in her to the minds of men. It was the humour and the generous understanding Mrs. Flint preferred, yet as she passed, her glance had never left her lips. There are things one woman knows about another, but of which no power except the heat of jealousy can make her speak. Her sight is swift to them. One glance, no more. These were the things that Mrs. Flint had seen, as they rode by her, this little company, on that very morning of the day that Dicky had come back.

And when the picture was re-completed in her mind, she sat down on the bed and said aloud—"There was the woman who would be a mate for him"—at which no sooner had the words been said than all the remembrance of his bitterness returned.

"Absence often heals," he had said. She heard the ring of disappointment once again, while in the momentary relaxation of her will, all hope came bounding back once more.

In sudden fear then lest it should take possession of her mind, she crossed the room and swiftly knelt beside the bed where Harry still lay sleeping with his head tucked in the angle of his arm.

"I've got you anyhow," she whispered—"You're



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his and you're mine too. No one shall ever take you away now—you're going to be mine—my very own."

So she had stilled the hope in her by contemplation of the days to come and all the new-found interest that the days would bring with a young voice calling through the long-time silence of the Mill.

CHAPTER V

THOSE three years of his absence, Dicky found, had added many years of age to his father.

It was not only the growing whiteness of his hair or the bending of his figure from the upright back and the well-set head; there was also behind the hearty intention of his smile of welcome, a heavy shadow of fatigue cutting short the smile in his eyes, relaxing unexpectedly the pressure of his hand. He looked to Dicky like a tree, bowing its head, not before age in which with bare branches it still should stand erect when all its fruitfulness is gone, but because some malady has struck it at its very root.

As though conscious of the scrutiny of Dicky's glance, he quickly smiled again; said how they had heard of his success.

"Who was the girl you painted for your picture—'Jade'? We saw a copy of it in some magazine. By kind permission of the artist—that was you of course. I suppose the kind permission was worth something. One doesn't give those things for nothing. We read an account of it underneath, how the



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Academy refused it and they took it in Paris. Of course, the Academy's a difficult thing to get into all at once. We know that. But they didn't say in the account who the girl was. Who was she?"

He talked swiftly, not unthinkingly for him perhaps. There was ever that intention in what he said to keep the father in his true relation to the son. But there was, too, that quickness in his voice which strove to make distraction in Dicky's mind. Conscious, no doubt, of the change in him, he was endeavouring to hide it from his son.

"She was a model, I suppose," he continued, "just a model in your studio?"

Mrs. Flint did not look up from her occupation of laying the cloth for six o'clock tea, but she listened intently to his reply. That question of Mr. Furlong's, expressed the curiosity which had been in both their minds when they had seen the reproduction of his portrait in the magazine. It was only the sudden need of something to say which had made him speak it then before her. Had he thought about it at all, he would have preferred to wait and ask Dicky when they were alone. But there it was; he had said it. It was after all a harmless matter. For what difference did it make whether she were a model or not? Artists had to paint something, and portraits, as he told himself, had to be of someone.

But the cut of the dress, the face of the girl herself, these had awakened Mrs. Flint's interest and curiosity. As has indeed been said, the picture had stirred the appreciation of more women than men.

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When therefore Dicky replied it was not a model, but a girl he knew who had kindly consented to sit for him, she smiled, not exactly enviously, not exactly with condescension, but as one who would say—"Don't tell me any more. Let's talk of something else." So much, indeed, did these words express the meaning of that smile, that her immediate action conveyed it, too. She left the room in the pursuit of her duties, when no duty could have taken her away if she had wished to stay.

They were still talking of his work when she returned. "Jade" had been sold for two hundred pounds. Mr. Furlong strove to keep the greater amazement from his eyes, but the magnitude of the sum bewildered him.

"Yes—I'm sure it's worth it," said he, but the casual note did not ring wholly true. Mrs. Flint, as well as Dicky, knew he was impressed by it. "Have you done any more portraits since then?" he continued—"That was two years ago—wasn't it?"

"Yes—two years. I haven't painted any portraits since. Some landscapes while I was away—a lot in Italy, some in France and Germany."

"Did you get good prices for those?"

"Well—they're all with Rheinhardt and Guernani—some are sold, but they're going to give an exhibition of my stuff this year—the man who bought 'Jade' will probably lend it. If you come up to London then, you could see it."

Mr. Furlong laughed. "A long journey," said he, "to see a picture."



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Dicky smiled uncomfortably, made conscious of his own egotism. He turned their conversation to his father's life and interests in the Mill; asked how things were going, whether in those days of labour unrest he had had any difficulty with the men.

"Oh—the men are all right," said Mr. Furlong, "so long as they get good wages and short hours. One must reduce possibilities of complaint to the utmost minimum—which I do, so far as competition permits."

"How about all this new machinery in mills?" Dicky enquired.

"Oh—yes—new machinery—" He turned on his heel. "They'll be getting corn to grind itself one of these days." Which, having said, he abruptly left the room.

Dicky looked at Mrs. Flint.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"He always gets like that when anyone speaks of the new machinery. It's cutting the prices and I believe that affects his trade. He can't do his grinding as quickly as they can. The water-power varies."

"It always did," said Dicky.

"Ah—but steam-power never does."

"Why doesn't he get the new machinery put in then?"

"He won't—perhaps he can't afford it—I don't know. You know how reticent he is. He never speaks of business to me. I ask him questions sometimes, but I think he resents them. He's fighting



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his battle, I suppose, but he likes to fight it in his own corner with none of his friends looking on. Aren't you like that, Dicky?"

"Am I?"

He looked up with a smile. His battle was going so well just then—it was victory all the way.

"You've had your bad times, I know, but you've never talked about them."

"Is he having a bad time, do you think?"

"I believe so."

"That's why he looks so much older then. Why doesn't he talk about it? Why doesn't he confide in someone?"

"Because I think he believes his determination is strong enough to conquer in the end."

That may have been it. But there came a day when his determination was broken.

At breakfast one morning a letter lay on his plate which he opened eagerly. That eagerness was palpable both to Dicky and Mrs. Flint. They paused in their meal to watch him. Then in one moment, ten years had settled in his face. He laid the letter down, staring at the food before him; picked it up and read it once again. Finally he put it in his pocket and left the room.

The eyes of Mrs. Flint and Dicky followed him; then they turned upon each other.

"Did you see that look in his face?" asked Dicky. "He became an old man as he sat there. He might have been ninety years old as he put that letter in his pocket." He rose from the table. "I'm not



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going to stand this father and son business any longer. He'll have to tell me what's the matter."

Mrs. Flint let him go. "This father and son business"—that made her smile when he had closed the door behind him. The very qualities which were weakness in his father had become strength in Dicky. No one could deny those two were like each other. The instinct which made Mr. Furlong strive so foolishly for the maintenance of his dignity, preserving that spirit of aloofness even in his moments of direst need, was the same instinct which, in Dicky, made him impatient with the petty folly of it all.

He found his father in the Mill, standing in the loft where the big wheel was revolving with its unceasing music, humming in the deep register of its voice that same untiring song which Dicky had heard from childhood. The sight of his father standing there, so near the massive wheel, where one false step would bring him death upon the instant, shot a swift thrill of fear across his heart. He hurried to his side. In a grip that made the poor man wince, he took his arm.

"What's the matter, father?" he called, raising his voice above the incessant noise.

Mr. Furlong shook his head. He may have said the word "nothing," but Dicky only saw the movement of his lips. The sound was carried far away into the mighty roaring of the wheel. Still then keeping his hold upon his father's arm, he led him away out of the loft, Mr. Furlong following with almost the obedience of a child.



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"Now," said Dicky, when they were back once more in the quieter surroundings of the house—"It's no good saying there's nothing the matter. All in one moment you became an old man when you read that letter. What is it? Something's hopelessly wrong. I thought there was when I first came home. It's obvious now—anyone could see it. What is it?"

Mr. Furlong lifted his eyes to Dicky's. They were like the eyes of a child brought face to face with the compulsion of confession.

"I've failed, Dicky," said he, and his voice was the voice of a child's—all authority gone from it, all energy, all command.

"You've failed? How do you mean? The Mill's still running—you're still grinding. The men are working just the same."

"Yes—the men don't know anything as yet. We've kept it from them. But trade has been bad these last two years. The steam-mills are taking all the work. I've had to get money advanced from the bank to meet my bills, hoping that corn would get a bit cheaper and things would be easier then. But I can't grind quick enough to make it pay. I owe the bank money, I've got other creditors, too."

"How much do you owe the bank?"

The poor man looked afraid of the direct question. He tried to temporise. He did not want to say the exact sum, but Dicky's eyes were holding him to it. He tried to face them with that fixed gaze which he had always met them with before, but they fell before the straightness of his gaze.

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"I don't quite know how much it is," said he. "Something over two hundred and fifty pounds, I think."

No wonder he had been astonished at the price of just a little paint upon a stretch of canvas. For the money paid upon that portrait he might have saved his name.

"And how much to the other creditors?" persisted Dicky. He had no intention of seeming stern; but this was no moment to waste time with fruitless sympathy. "How much would you think?"

Mr. Furlong's eyes were hunted as he looked about him, trying in his confusion to search within his mind. There was Bates, twelve pounds odd. There was Mr. Leggatt—his old friend Leggatt—thirty pounds he owed to him. There was Simpson, the farmer—there was Prendergast, the corn-merchant—there were many others. Their faces came and went—all threateningly—across the vision of his mind. In a moment they had become a menacing crowd, all crying out their demands with one voice. It was impossible to distinguish and count them every one.

He looked back at Dicky and in a bewildered voice replied: "I—I couldn't say how much. That letter told me there was to be a meeting of the creditors this morning. I'd hoped they were going to let me go on a bit longer and try and fight it out."

"Where is the meeting?"

"At Earnshaw's—the solicitor in Pershore. I shall have to get the trap ready at once and drive off there now."



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"Will you have to be present before all your creditors?"

"No—but I shall be there in another room, I suppose."

"Then I'm coming with you," said Dicky, "I'll be there. I'd like to see those creditors. I'll go and tell John to get out the trap at once."

CHAPTER VI

THE country solicitor, and in a town the dimensions of Pershore, is an individual of some importance. He is secretary of the local tennis club. He takes the chair at small political meetings in the Unionist Club when they pass a vote of censure on some Liberal member of the Government—if it so happens that the Liberals are in power. He is a pillar of the Church, so far, indeed, as the Church needs a pillar among the laity. But his greatest importance lies in the fact that he knows everybody's secrets; their pasts and their presents are an open book to him, in consequence of which, everyone holds him in complete and undivided respect.

Upon such a man as the country solicitor usually is, this is liable to have but one effect. He becomes pretentious. There is such a thing as an opulence of information. He possesses it and wears it, as a lord mayor wears his chain of office, conspicuously in his manner. Such a man was Mr. Earnshaw.



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He received Mr. Furlong that morning with such obvious avoidance of all reference to the distressful matter in hand, that it passed beyond the region of tact, becoming almost inappropriate.

Mrs. Earnshaw, it appeared, the day before, had distributed the prizes at a spring flower show, which were popular in that neighbourhood just then, and Lady Kenderdine had been present. Her gardener had shown the most gorgeous array of Darwin tulips—really the most beautiful tulips that Mr. Earnshaw had ever seen. And she was so nice about it all. Mrs. Earnshaw had been charmed with her. She took such an interest in every exhibit, though, of course, none compared to hers.

Dicky dug his hands deep into his pockets, watching the simple patience on his father's face. So far as Mr. Furlong was concerned, he would not have offered a word to arrest this account of Lady Kenderdine's Darwin tulips. Indeed the blow he had received that morning had dazed and frightened him. Life, which he had faced with such confidence up till then, had suddenly seemed to have become his unyielding oppressor. But Dicky had no interest in Lady Kenderdine or her tulips.

"How about these creditors?" said he, "what time are they going to be here?"

Mr. Earnshaw looked a little shocked. This abrupt allusion to a painful matter which all in good time would declare itself, was not, he thought, in the best of taste. However, this young man was Furlong's son, and Furlong himself was only a miller.



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Never having had any lawyer's business to transact before—Mr. Furlong had not previous to this come into contact with Mr. Earnshaw—the Pershore solicitor had heard of him, that was all. Then their meetings over this insolvency business had begun. But of Dicky, he knew nothing. The son probably helped the father in his business and, like all members of a younger generation, was callous and contemptuous of any sentiment.

He conveyed in the expression of his face the reproof which he thought this callousness deserved and replied that they were expected at eleven o'clock.

"Your father, of course, will not meet them. He can stay in my little private office if he likes till it's all over. Perhaps you'd like to remain with him?"

"No—I'll come in and hear what the creditors have got to say," said Dicky.

And all this time, like a child whose future is being discussed in its own hearing, like a child also who seems bewildered at the thought that it has a future at all, who stands on the threshold of life and, with confused sight, gazes into this distance beyond, Mr. Furlong stood beside them looking up from one to the other as they spoke, his eyes full of that pathetic impotence as comes upon a man when all his initiative is gone. He was ready to do anything he was told. He was in the solicitor's hands and also, so the impression stole upon his mind, in Dicky's, too.

"That's hardly usual," Mr. Earnshaw said, "unless you are a creditor yourself. Your father's interests are quite safe with me. However, just as

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you like. I should have thought you would have preferred to stay away. It's, of course, a painful business."

"You'd better come and sit with me, Dicky," said Mr. Furlong, mildly. Mr. Earnshaw impressed him strongly as a man who knew the proper thing to do under these strange and terrible circumstances.

But Dicky's mind was quietly made up.

"I'll see the creditors," said he, and sat in the big office with Mr. Earnshaw until they began to arrive. The solicitor was to all appearances busily engrossed with papers on the desk before him, but curiosity at the same time was gently pricking his mind. Something in Dicky's general appearance and manner had aroused the instinct. He enquired what Dicky and his father would do if the creditors decided to sell the Mill.

"I don't know what my father will do," said Dicky, "I haven't thought about it yet. I don't suppose he has either."

"Have you thought what you'll do? Of course, you're a young man compared to him."

"Yes—I've thought what I shall do."

"Would it be improper to ask what that is?" the solicitor enquired.

"Oh—I shall go on with my work," said Dicky.

Mr. Earnshaw's curiosity pricked him deeply. When your fund of information of other people's affairs is almost unlimited, curiosity upon a matter which is being withheld from you, is apt to become importunate. Mr. Earnshaw was about to put an-



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other oblique question as he would to a witness at petty sessions when the office boy opened the door and announced—"Mr. Satterthwaite—Mr. Bates—Mr. Prendergast."

Three men walked into the room, with their hats in their hands. With all his sympathies already aroused, their very way of entering that room seemed aggressive to Dicky. They were coming as it were, into the presence of a dead body, not as those who do approach the figure of death, but as men prepared to strip it of all which in the eyes of the law, they could lay claim to.

"Good-morning, Mr. Satterthwaite, good-morning, Mr. Bates, good-morning, Mr. Prendergast." The solicitor knew them all; knew no doubt as well the little difficulties in life through which they had weathered with varying success. They returned his salutations with respect, each one glancing at Dicky, wondering how big a creditor he was; endeavouring to calculate by how much his claim would reduce the meagre shillings in the enviable pound.

From this moment, although it had barely struck the hour of eleven, they all came trooping in. All the tradesmen with whom Mr. Furlong had ever dealt, they arrived with a promptitude which only the desire to get their money could ever have driven them to.

Not last of all, came Mr. Leggatt who, with the raised eyebrows of surprise and, making some effort at geniality when he saw Dicky sitting there, came across the room and sat down beside him.

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"This is an unhappy business," said he, in an undertone. "Are you being let in for much?"

"Nothing at all," said Dicky.

"You're lucky. I lent him thirty pounds, never thinking—how should I—that he was going to turn out like this."

"It isn't him turning out like this," said Dicky, swiftly, "it's circumstance. It's nothing to do with him. The steam-mills have crushed him."

"Yes—yes—of course. I know that. It's no fault of his—I know that. I don't suppose a more honourable man ever lived. But thirty pounds you know—it's a lot of money to me. You wouldn't like to lose thirty pounds, my boy. Well—not all of it is lost. At least we hope not. Have you any idea what he can pay in the pound?"

"None," said Dicky, and felt his gorge rising within him.

A clerk then called out the names of all present, each man answering in the affirmative as he heard his own.

"I think now," said Mr. Earnshaw, "if you will all kindly sign your names to this paper, we can get to business."

Mr. Leggatt rose at once. "Well—perhaps as the largest creditor here," said he—the only satisfaction left to him in the matter—"I may as well sign first." He took the pen and wrote his name, drawing a deep breath of regret as he did so that it should have to be written in such a cause.

When all the rest of the company had done the

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same, Mr. Earnshaw settled himself in his chair. "I will now," said he, "read out the sums claimed by each of the creditors in turn as they are written here on the paper and will each gentleman kindly confirm the sum as I name it."

"Mr. Leggatt—thirty pounds."

Those who were owed less than that amount all looked at Mr. Leggatt somewhat in respect, somewhat in sympathy. Those who were owed more, raised their eyes to the ceiling, trying to preserve their patience until their own turn should come. Mr. Leggatt, still believing himself to be the largest creditor present, confirmed the sum with the air of a man who intends to be charitable at all costs but those of justice. Mr. Earnshaw then continued.

"Mr. Prendergast—five pounds twelve and six."

"That's right," said the corn-merchant, with determination.

"Mr. Bates—twelve and six."

The little ironmonger acknowledged the sum, standing on the tips of his toes to overlook the shoulders of the others; making sure that his voice was heard.

And so on, the names of the creditors continued, in sums varying from as little as three shillings to as much as fifty pounds. There was, however, no sign of diversity in the instincts of them all. Each one of them had set his mind upon the recovery of his losses. In none but in the mind of Dicky rose the vision of that pathetic figure in the other room, waiting, as a child awaits for its chastisement and disgrace, for



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the verdict of these men who, in times gone by, had so eagerly and so courteously solicited his custom.

There is a picture of Richard Furlong's hanging now in one of the public art galleries in the North, unlike any other picture he ever painted, full of realism, and with no saving grace of beauty in it but the beauty of absolute truth. It was called "The Meeting of the Creditors," the result, of course, of that one morning's experience in the solicitor's office in Pershore.

It is not in high light. There are no portraits in that group of men. Dicky did not see things with the microscopic eye of a Maclise. It was his impression of that morning in Mr. Earnshaw's office, with the dim light and the musty, judicial atmosphere, that he painted. You see the faces of greed peering out of the obscured corner of the room, and they are tradesmen; but you cannot point to one saying—he is an ironmonger—he is a grocer. There is just the greed of human nature, caught unawares and unconcealed. A meeting of creditors—and there it hangs upon the wall of that art gallery in the North. I often wonder as I look at it, how many of the visitors who read its poignant lesson ever admit they are in need of such teaching themselves.

When the matter of the various sums of money was disposed of, Mr. Earnshaw cleared his throat and rose portentously to his feet. If there were any one in Pershore accustomed to public speaking, it was he. Therefore he waited until a respectful hush had



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fallen upon the voices of those around him, after which he began to speak.

"Gentlemen—" Mr. Bates helped himself on to the tips of his toes by the aid of Mr. Satterthwaite's shoulders in front of him—"I have here a painful duty to perform—" but seeing that he had nothing to claim, except his fees which he was sure of getting, there was no one in that room who seemed to be suffering less pain than Mr. Earnshaw. "You all of you know Mr. Furlong, in many respects perhaps better than I do. But from what I have heard on every hand, and from what I have seen myself, since he placed the matter of his insolvency in my hands, I am bound to say I have found him a most honourable man. Insolvency, of course, is an ugly word, but there are some cases—and this is one—in which to call a meeting of one's creditors is the only honourable course and when it is taken in the spirit in which Mr. Furlong——"

Mr. Prendergast, who had been present at many meetings with Mr. Earnshaw and was also himself a member of the Unionist Club, realised at this point that the solicitor was in some danger of drifting into the depths of oratory. It needed a certain degree of promptitude to rescue him and, in the light of his five pounds twelve and sixpence, Mr. Prendergast was prompt and to the point.

"Pardon my interruption, Mr. Earnshaw," said he, "but what assets has Mr. Furlong got? We've heard all about the liabilities, let's have the assets."

A more hopeful expression than had yet been seen

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made itself evident at once in everybody's face. But in an instant it had fallen into greater gloom than before.

"I am sorry to say," replied Mr. Earnshaw, "that there is yet another liability which I was just about to mention. Mr. Furlong owes to the bank the sum of four hundred and fifty pounds."

Had the local fire engine come round and, through the window turned the hose upon them, there could have been no more deranged a company of men. Every extra penny of the miller's debts meant something off their shillings in the pound, and Dicky heard the sibilant whispering of their voices as they muttered this despoiling sum below their breath.

It was here that Mr. Satterthwaite, the dealer from whom Mr. Furlong had bought all his dray horses, rose quickly to his feet.

"As the largest creditor here," he began, as indeed, except for the bank, he was, "I think I've a right to ask that the assets be read out to us at once without any more of this palaver about the honesty of Mr. Furlong. We know his intentions were honest enough, but honesty won't fill stomachs. As far as I'm concerned, I'm very sorry for the miller. I expect everybody else is, too. But let's have the assets."

There was a murmur of approval as Mr. Satterthwaite sat down. This was thought by all to be a reasonable, straightforward and businesslike speech. They were, of course, all of them, very sorry for the miller, but as Mr. Satterthwaite had said—what were the assets?



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The solicitor was thus dragged forth from his stream of oratory and brought back to the dry land of facts. He turned to his papers.

"There are," said he, "seventy-three pounds in book debts to be collected. There is the stock of the Mill—plant, machinery, carts, horses, etc., which have been valued at the sum of one hundred and eighty-one pounds. There are the personal effects of Mr. Furlong himself, making in all a sum of three hundred and sixty pounds odd. These, gentlemen, together with the value of the Mill itself, are the assets to be set against the sum of eleven hundred and eighty-nine pounds, ten shillings and fourpence. It has been suggested that possibly Mr. Furlong might carry on the business and work off these debts in time. I have discussed this matter with him and with the bank and Mr. Furlong himself has been brought reluctantly to the opinion that it would be to no purpose. The year before last, the Mill showed a loss of thirty-one pounds and last year a loss of ninety-six. The steam-mills, gentlemen, have been the death blow to the old water-mill. We regret to say that it can no longer be regarded as a paying concern."

As though by common consent, Mr. Satterthwaite became the speaker for the creditors once again.

"The good will of the business then is worth nothing?"

"Nothing at all," replied Mr. Earnshaw.

"How much is the building worth—the house and so on?"



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"It might be worth four hundred pounds. The house is not a very capacious one, and the Mill itself is really useless to anyone, except possibly to someone with capital who might care to put some money into it and turn the place into a manufactory of some kind or another."

"Very unlikely," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "It's too far from anywhere."

"I'm afraid that it is unlikely," replied Mr. Earnshaw.

"Well, then, it stands at the best," continued the horse-dealer, "with liabilities to the amount of eleven hundred pounds odd and the assets amount to seven hundred and sixty. That's roughly about fifteen shillings in the pound."

The solicitor inclined his head.

"I must repeat," said he, "how honourably I think, as I am sure you all do, Mr. Furlong has acted in this matter. He has not floundered on into deeper water, borrowing here, borrowing there, as many another man might have done to keep his head up. He has honestly admitted defeat, when defeat came. The fact that he can pay fifteen shillings in the pound, speaks for itself. This is the honest failure of an honest man."

Throughout the room, Dicky heard murmurs of assent; but a slow anger was burning in his eyes as he watched them. It lit up swiftly into an eager glow as Mr. Leggatt rose to his feet.

"I am an old friend of Mr. Furlong's," said he, "and I want to endorse here every word that Mr.



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Earnshaw has said. Mr. Furlong is and has been a most honourable man and I for one, am bitterly sorry to see him come to this distressful state and through no fault of his own. But as a fairly substantial creditor, I should like to suggest that if the Mill and the stock are to be sold, they should be sold at once without delay. I know from former experience how quickly the value of these things depreciates through procrastination."

"The schoolmaster's quite right," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "I don't know what his last word meant, but the sense I caught of it was good common sense. Everything ought to be sold at once."

Now the light in Dicky's eyes was a furnace, shooting flames. He jumped to his feet and addressed himself to the solicitor.

"When you say my father's personal effects," said he, "do you mean his furniture at the Mill, the bed he sleeps in—the table at which he has his meals?"

"I'm afraid that is so," replied Mr. Earnshaw.

At which Dicky turned upon them all.

"Then do any of you people here realise," he cried, "that you're turning my father out into the world—a man of more than sixty years of age—you're turning him out without a stick or stone to his name. Are there any of you here who want to take the clothes off his back, because, my God, let them stand up here in front of me and make the claim without any of this cant of sympathy and vacuous regret. Have none of you ever had to meet failure? My Heaven, if you ever have, I hope you'll be treated

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with the same implacable justice and the same damned spirit of greed."

The saliva was wet at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were brilliant with the passion in his heart. And when the horse-dealer—accustomed to bruising all his life, stepped out into the middle of the room, as one who would settle this business and quickly in the way it should be done, Dicky faced him in readiness for anything that might take place.

"Who is this gentleman?" asked Mr. Satterthwaite calmly.

"I'm Mr. Furlong's son," replied Dicky.

"Are you a creditor, too—may I ask?"

"No."

"Then what the hell are yer doing 'ere? You've got no business at this meeting at all."

"Haven't I?" cried Dicky. "How the devil do you know?"

"What is your business then?"

"I'm here to buy the Mill and put money into your dirty pockets, so you can take your seat back there again with the rest of all your friends, and thank God I'm here at all."

CHAPTER VII

THE joy of learning Nature all over again through the vision and the senses of his son, persuaded Dicky to linger on in Eckington. Spring that year was more wonderful to him than



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ever. There was nothing in Italy or France, nor in all the world to compare with those green meadows by the Avon. The grandeur of the mountains, the wealth of the vineyards, they all faded from his memory beside those luscious stretches of green where the celandine and the cuckoo flower were stars of a milky way in the damp, deep grass.

Yet this was not the only purpose that held him there. He deceived himself as to the true reason of his delay; busied his mind with the conversion of the Mill into a gigantic studio, superintending all the removal of the machinery and planning out the design on which the studio should be formed. With infinite patience, he aroused his father's interests in the scheme he had in view. Acknowledging that the Mill was no longer a paying concern, the poor man yet suffered bitterly as he saw the machinery removed. He had gained a respect now for Dicky and his work, but even then was ever exercising his control lest he should show it.

"It's as well to turn the Mill to some account," said he. "It'd be a pity to let it stand absolutely idle. But whoever would have thought that after all these years of work, grinding corn for nearly two hundred years to feed the lives of men, that it was going to come to this."

Dicky smiled.

"It might be worse employed," said he.

Mr. Furlong agreed that it might; but it was a reluctant admission.

This then was another occupation which kept



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Dicky from his return to London. But it was not the vital motive that deeply stirred, unacknowledged, in the seclusion of his mind.

Mrs. Flint was responsible for what had happened. Mrs. Flint it was, with every intention conscious to her thoughts, yet never dreaming how effective her design had been, who had brought into Dicky's life, not only the purpose of his delay, but that very destiny which, if for one moment alone, yet truly then, it had been her earnest desire that he should meet.

On the pretext of seeing the interior of Woolas Hall, that old Jacobean Mansion which stood half-way up the Bredon Hill when the conspirators of the Gunpowder Plot were setting spurs to their horses and riding hard for safety, Mrs. Flint persuaded Dicky to come with her there to a spring flower show that was being held in the grounds.

"You must see the musicians' gallery," she told him. "From the outside, too, the house is really wonderful. Fancy your having been here all these years and never even having seen inside the gates."

He went with her; but this was not her purpose. The guests were still at the Hall. The day before she had seen the same girl pass down the road to Eckington, when the desire in her that these two should meet, became insistent again. Here was an opportunity at least. As they neared the house, her heart began a wild beating in her breast.

What had she done? she asked herself, as though the matter were already accomplished, as though already Dicky had found the destiny she judged was



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there awaiting him. For now that there was no turning back, she had begun to wish that she had let things shape their course alone without her interference or support. It never occurred to her they might not meet, or that her errand might prove fruitless if they did. She was possessed, as many women are when matters of their heart are in concern, with that strange sense of premonition in the mind. They were to meet, she knew full well. The beating of her heart was not an idle pulse. But of that destiny, the threads of which were set upon the loom that very day, she was as innocent as any child. Like any child, whose uninstructed fingers wander across the strings of some old instrument, she played with Fate in all unconsciousness of what she did.

For they did meet. She stood beside a stall heaped with wind-flowers as Dicky and Mrs. Flint came by and, as his eyes were suddenly arrested there in hers, Mrs. Flint's heart stood still. She had known it—she had known it, she told herself, repeating the words again. But she had not known all the meaning of that glance. For there in her Dicky had seen the face of the girl whose carriage had been drawn up close to theirs that day when they had borne his Constance down the Harrow Road.

Had she recognised him? Why should her mind at all have held a recollection of his face? Yet he had cause to think it had, for in that glance, bewildered memory had started to her eyes. She looked as one who struggles to recall a thought. As they moved away, it seemed to Dicky, as in apparent



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callousness he looked back, that she had found remembrance.

But how was it she had remembered? Could her impression of him have been as deeply made as his of her? Only a few weeks before, as they had brought Mrs. Baldwin down that same long, tiring road to Kensal Green, a thought of her had come to him, a recollection of how that day he had drawn the features of her face upon his memory. Now she was here in close proximity to his home.

All that it seemed at first was just how strange it was that they should meet again. But that a meaning lay behind it all, this did not enter his mind to think. How should it? It was Mrs. Flint who first set out his thoughts upon another course.

"What did you think of that girl by the stall where the anemones were?" she asked.

At the sound of her question, Dicky felt all his mind shrink back within itself. For some reason he made no effort to explain, he felt no desire to speak of her.

"She looked very attractive," said he, "standing by the side of those flowers." Whereby he would have had her think the flowers were as much in his thoughts as she. And he said no more; did not even tell her how they had met three years ago. The cloak of his reticence had fallen on him. With circumstance still so flimsy a thing, he had no desire to speak of it.

Wherefore, discerning this, Mrs. Flint said no more, but let him lead her through the grounds until



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their steps were drawn to the stall of wind-flowers once again. This was a surer answer than that to any question she might ask; and when they found she had gone, from that moment Dicky's interest in the flower show died away. They walked back down the winding, hilly drive in silence to the Mill.

I was right, she told herself that night as she undressed and prepared herself for bed—I knew I was right. But only a woman would have found conviction in the little proof she had. What had indeed been proofs to her were those of her intended finding. Dicky's silence at tea that evening, the way in which he had avoided her, his affecting tenderness when he came up to her bedroom to kiss Harry as he lay asleep. It was from countless little things such as these that she knew she was right. The Fate of his work, that was always at movement in him, but this, the Destiny of his heart, after these years, as of a winter's sleep, was stirring and awake.

She opened her window and looked out. A clear spring moon was cut in silver in the black-blue sky. There were stars in heaven and in the garden below her all the flowers were stars as well. She watched the moonlight trembling on the river, then suddenly the sound of a cough fell on her ears. She leant further across the window-sill and looked out.

Dicky's bedroom was on the same side of the house as hers and, by his window there, he stood as well. Where she was seeing the signal of her resignation in the stars, he was regarding all the countless possibilities of Fate.

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CHAPTER VIII

SO it was for this, the hope of seeing her again, that Dicky stayed on from day to day at the Mill. A week ran by, when all the time his studio was vacant in London waiting for his return. He had written to Fanny several times, naming the day of his arrival, and several times had altered it to another date.

Each day he took out his materials and sketched about the countryside in hope of seeing her. At last one morning when, more venturesome than he had been before, he was working on Bredon Hill, high up above, but overlooking the Hall, where he might see her if she should come out, he perceived the figure of a woman pass out through the gates. An instinct told him it was she. In that moment his hand became suspended from its work, while she stood motionless in debate, choosing the way to go. He saw her head turned upwards towards the hill above. She must be one, he thought, who rather would ascend; at which, as though to prove that he was right, she set the valley at her back and so began to climb the winding path.

He little thought it then, but it was his figure, an artist working on that far hillside, that had attracted her. Art roused a keen interest in her mind. He was to learn that soon enough. There had been one year when she had taken it seriously herself, and in those twelve months learnt, as many do, that not a



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year, but all a lifetime must be sacrificed for it. From that moment she had laid her brushes down, too proud to only dabble in the game. But always since then, the efforts of the amateur amused her. In Kensington Gardens she frequently would stop behind their chairs much better pleased to criticise than to be judged.

To see one of these poor aspiring creatures then and in that far countryside was all the impetus she needed to decide her way. With a humorous anticipation of opportunity for amusement, she called the little terrier that had followed her from the house, fell to the whistling of a tune in those soft, uncertain notes most women produce, and began her climbing of the hill.

It was a day for work, a day for play, a day for love, a day for everything. No hill could have seemed too high that day to climb; no hill but what it would have tempted you to see what lay beyond. The bees were on the wing, striking their deep, reverberating note in the faint orchestra which, on such a day, until the sun sets, plays its ceaseless murmuring symphony of life.

Down in the valley, in the clumps of elms, the cuckoo called, the wood-pigeons cooed their fluted love-songs, and in a gentle breeze the countless sounds of life, as to an unseen baton in an unseen hand, were all controlled and harmonised and blent into the magic music of the day.

In Dicky's ears no passion music could have stirred a deeper note, yet through it all, as she climbed up



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the hill, with softest penetration, came the gentle whistling of her tune.

This was a moment when a man might fall in love. With a trembling beating of his heart he felt as though the air were full of birds' wings fluttering round his head. He bent his eyes downwards, half hiding his face and tried to go on with his work.

Still she came nearer but not until a few yards separated them did she recognise who it was. Impetuous curiosity then rose in her, struggling with a consideration of delicacy that, seeing who it was, she had better pass him by.

He heard her footsteps as they came, but did not raise his head. Yet determination now was set firmly in his mind that if she did not stop, as so many people did, then he would speak, risking the frigid politeness of her reply which would forever render their acquaintance an impossibility.

But then the footsteps ceased. He knew she stood behind him. How nearly she had passed he had not guessed; for only when she had gone by had curiosity conquered and turned her head, when she had seen the arresting quality of the work he did. She well knew what was good or bad, therefore interest was added to her inclination. Of a sudden, she stood and watched.

It was no landscape he was painting, though all the rolling lines of hill and stretch of pasture in the vale below were there upon his canvas. But they were background only to the subject he pursued; and he had caught it, too. It was that music in the air



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wherein he had divined that beauty lay. With the colour and the mist, the heat and light, the thing that he had done murmured the very song she still heard ringing in her ears.

He was no poor, aspiring creature then, such as she first had thought. The miller's son at Eckington, so much she had discovered for herself after their meeting at the Hall. So with that knowledge, his name, his very existence had drifted out of her mind. But now she had found he was an artist, and with ability that astonished her. It might astonish him, she thought, if he knew how good that was. A spark of humour lit up in her eyes, the corners of her lips betrayed that promise of a smile.

"Would it annoy you or interrupt your work if I asked you something about it?" she enquired. That was the first time the sound of her voice had come to Dicky's ear, and it was more than all he had known it would be. Not the refinement of it thrilled him, nor the ease and quiet confidence it conveyed that they must listen to that voice who heard it, but the deeper note before which all culture and all breeding must stand aside—the human note, as when a black-bird sings as God and Nature taught it.

He steadied his own voice as he replied she might ask him anything she liked.

Then she came closer to his side.

"You've made all the landscape in that picture very indistinct," said she. "You've kept it under so much. Why have you done it?"

He laid his canvas down on the grass.

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"Listen," said he.

She put her head on one side, expecting—what? Some quite specific sound that would attract her ear, when, hearing none, she asked him what it was that she must listen to.

"Everything," he replied; "nothing—there, that bee now, that pigeon in the wood. Listen to the noise that sheep makes as it grazes. Can't you hear that thrush? There he is, singing in that thorn bush over there. That's why I've kept the landscape under. All those sounds are combining to make one incessant note of music."

She was watching his face, discovering all the varied expressions that were constantly changing as he spoke. There was, as well, amazement in her own.

"Is that what you're painting?" she asked.

"What I'm trying to do," he replied.

"But you've done it," said she. "That's not so amazing to me, though, as that you meant to. When I first looked over your shoulder I saw it. It's the note that has been singing in my ears, too, ever since I came out. But I thought it had—been a fluke. Those were the things I thought an artist got hold of by the grace of God."

He stood there listening to her, hot confusion in his face.

In the secret heart of every woman lives a fairy prince, and if there be Romance in life at all, in every man a princess, too. It is a title, not of kingdoms, but of qualities, yet to complete the savour of Ro-

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mance, she must be set above him, out of reach. The desire to win her is a half-formed dream which seldom comes even to contemplation. But here it was in actual ponderance in Dicky's mind. He looked at her there beside him, the gentle wind of spring tossing her fair brown hair to lights of gold, with all her youth and freshness, her humour and her understanding, filling the brightness of her eyes to overflowing.

She raised a hand to set back a wisp of hair, and from that hand alone he might have seen the fine, high spirit that generations had bred in her. For the moment his eyes were fixed upon it, the strongest in a woman, yet the most sensitive hand he had ever seen. It was a shape to draw alone for beauty. His heart beat at the thought of what might feel the touch of those slender fingers on his own.

She saw his confusion, recognised it perhaps. It was unconcealed admiration. She had seen that in men's eyes before, but never accompanied by this frank bewilderment as now. She would have been no woman if the strangeness of it had not pleased her. For a moment or two she let it still remain, and then in pity helped him out.

"You look surprised," said she, "to find anyone in this quiet corner of the world knowing anything about it—not that I know much."

That was not the full meaning of his surprise, but so she gave him loophole for recovery.

"One doesn't expect it," he replied smiling.



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"But I imagine you know a good deal—you're keen about it."

"I went to an art school once—years ago, when I was eighteen"—she smiled as her memory recalled that period of her life—"as girls do, you know, taking up some interest or other in their lives before they come out, thinking they're going to make a serious matter of it. I learnt enough in a year to know what making a serious matter of it meant, at the same time that I found enough sense to give it up."

"You weren't really keen then?"

"Oh, yes, I was; but it needs a lot of the energy of ambition to create. I hadn't got it, and I wasn't content with copying. Not many women have got it, you know. More than there used to be, and as fast as they go on giving up domestic life so they'll increase in numbers. It's in human nature to make something, from history down to boot-laces."

"So you chose domestic life?" said he, fearing she meant marriage, and holding to this conversation on herself conscious that for the moment his personality was subservient to hers.

"Well, I came out—that was the beginning of it—that is the doorway into the garden of domesticity." She opened her mouth and laughed like a child. "I must have been a funny little artist then," said she, "making my little charcoal sketches from the plaster casts and religiously taking them home with the approving mark of the master initialed in one corner."

"He always approved?"



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"Always. I was one of those pupils who had to be encouraged. My father had lent his name to the support of the school. It was a young ladies' seminary of art. Nothing Bohemian about it."

She laughed heartily again. He could see the picture as plainly as she, and laughed as well. And in the midst of her laughter she glanced at him, thinking how hard it was to believe that he was just a miller's son; or that she was standing there on the hillside talking to him all about herself. Yet why not? He was a clever young man; more brains in him, if there had been all the intention he admitted in his sketch, than many of the so-called clever young men she met in London. It was, as she looked at him then, that she recalled again the something familiar in his face which she had seen when with Mrs. Flint he had passed the flower stall.

"You're Mr. Furlong, aren't you?" she asked, pursuing that thought, and finding an unexpected warmth in her cheeks as she put the question.

"Yes," said he, surprised; "how did you know?"

"I saw you the other day at the little flower show at the Hall—I'm staying there."

"Why did you ask?"

"Because, somehow or other, I thought I'd seen you somewhere before."

"You have."

"Where?"

"Three years ago—a little more—your carriage stopped beside a funeral in the Harrow Road."

Remembrance of it all swept into her face. She



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saw that humble little procession, the hearse, the coffin without a single wreath, then the carriage following and the face of that young man she had seen at the window.

"There's the most tragic face I've ever seen," she had said to her companion. Until they had moved on into the traffic, she had not been able to take her eyes away. So that was where she had seen him before. She looked at him again to find what that tragedy had become; a deep thoughtfulness, a certain mastery of himself, an interest greater even than tragedy had lent it then.

"I remember," she said, and with the thought of it could ring a note of gentlest sympathy in her voice. "You looked terribly sad."

"It was my wife's funeral," said Dicky in simple explanation.

"Your wife's?"

"We'd only been married two years or so."

"But you must have been very young."

"I was about twenty-four."

"Married when you were twenty-two?"

"Yes."

"How frightfully sad."

"It was."

"Have you any children?"

"A little boy. He's living down in the Mill now."

"How long have you been an artist?"

"Since I was eighteen. I ran away from home here and went up to London."



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"There's an artist of your name," said she. "I wonder if you've seen his work? He's got tremendous promise in him. In fact, I think, if he goes on, he'll be the biggest man we've got. I saw a portrait of his in the Salon about two years ago, and I've looked out for all his work since."

"What was the picture in the Salon?" asked Dicky, "because——"

"It was the portrait of a woman—the most astounding knowledge of women in it, too—he'd called it 'Jade.' The girl was wearing a necklace and a bracelet of jade on her wrist. You ought to see it."

It was impossible to utterly subdue pride when that praise was stinging in his ears. Yet so much of simplicity was in him that even when he replied, "I have seen it," she had not guessed it was his.

"Oh, you have? Well, now don't you think it was an amazing piece of work?"

He laughed, half in confusion, half at the joy of it.

"Well, I—I can't say," he stammered. "I—I did it. It's—it's mine."

"Yours!" It was her turn for confusion and astonishment now. "You're Richard Furlong then? What a fool you must think I am!"

"No, indeed; why should I think that?"

"But the name, of course—and that!" she pointed to his canvas on the ground. "I ought to have guessed from that. But somehow or other, I suppose, seeing you out here—in the distance thinking



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that you were an aspiring amateur—even thinking, when I looked over your shoulder, that what you had done was a fluke—well, it's reasonable enough, I suppose. Only one doesn't expect to meet big men on little stools." Her eyes took in the camp-stool on which he had been sitting, and this she said as much in humour as in truth. The smile accompanied it at the corners of her mouth, but there was a full depth of admiration in her eyes.

"Well, now mayn't we shake hands," said she, with the smile breaking to a laugh—"now that circumstance has formally introduced us."

She was one to be amused with life, to lose none of its adventures. With an engaging frankness she held out her hand. He took it, thinking what he had thought before; finding his heart beating as he had known it would. This was an adventure, too, for him.

"I don't know whether you've noticed it," said he, "but in formally introducing us, circumstance has omitted to say your name."

"Oh, Charteris," she laughed; "Diana Charteris. I don't know why, but I thought you knew."

"How should I know?"

"You—you might have asked, like I did. You might have had my vulgar curiosity."

"I did," said he; "all of it—perhaps more. What I lacked was your opportunity."

"Well, now," said she; "I've talked a lot about myself—I shouldn't have done it if I'd known. She sat down on the short turf as though the whole



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day were there before her. "Now I want to hear something about you—unless—do you want to go on with that?" Her head nodded to the canvas on the ground. "I'm being abominably selfish this morning; I'm afraid that's the way I go through life. It's adventure that thrills me. This is an adventure." Her eyes played about his face, and again it seemed the air was full of birds' wings fluttering round his head.

"There's nothing much to tell," said he, but sat down there beside her, content in the joy of telling all.

CHAPTER IX

IT was true enough, there was not much to tell, since how in those first few moments of their meeting could he tell her all? But those two years abroad, what he had learnt, what he had thought of it all, of Titian in Venice, of Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci in Florence, of Velasquez in Madrid.

"You *must* come back to him," he declared. "Sometimes its Rembrandt and Van Eyck and the Dutchmen, sometimes Tintoretto and all the Italians, sometimes the French; but back you come again to Velasquez, the perfect master of simplicity."

It was amusing to hear the real artist's views of them all; but when he began to take one picture after another, she turned the conversation towards himself. That sort of talk she had heard times

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and again over the intellectual dinner-tables in London. Certainly there was the constant flash of originality in all he had to say; but that was not what she wanted. She was no student of psychology watching the development of ideas, but a woman with the warmth of the spring in her veins and the pulse of adventure in her heart. And it was not venturesome to talk of Velasquez; that was for moments sipping champagne and tiring for the end of a dreary dinner. Here they were on a wild hillside, not a soul in sight, drinking the finer wine of God's air under God's heaven.

"I want to hear some more about 'Jade,'" she said. "You called it that, of course, because of the bracelet and the necklace."

"Yes; I meant that bit of green to catch the eye first, like it did mine."

"Was she a model?"

"No; just a girl who sat for me—a girl I knew."

"Was she a friend of yours?"

"No—o. Why do you ask that?"

"If she were a friend, I couldn't exactly say what I wanted to say."

For the moment his thoughts fell back to Fanny Cornish.

"You can say anything you like," said he.

"Well, did you realise the double meaning in that title?"

"The double meaning?"

"Yes; I don't say that was the cleverness of it, but it was the key to all the cleverness of the picture."



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She was a jade herself. How did you get to understand women like that when you were only twenty-five?"

Did he know that he did understand them? It is dangerous in any case for a woman to tell a man such a thing as that, meaning as it does, you may understand me if you like—I am to be understood by such a man as you. So she was dangerous, whether she knew it or not. There was half her charm; there, on that morning at least, the thrill of the adventure lay.

He answered evasively; afraid of himself and her. She was the first woman who had told him so, he said.

"But wherever that picture has been discussed," said she, "I've heard women say the same thing. Of course, you must have known the girl very well."

There was a suggestion of comprehension, more in her words than in her voice. He felt urged to defend himself, not being one of those men who boasts of conquests.

"I really know her very slightly," he answered quickly—then told her the whole story of Fanny Cornish. "Which you won't understand," he added when he had finished. "That's not your sort of life."

She looked at him with the half-closed eyes of speculation, wondering how many of the men she knew would have played Don Quixote to that minx's trickeries.

"She was a jade then," she remarked at last.



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"You understood that with your paints and brushes quick enough. You astonish me, you know."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Your strange mixture of ideal realism and real idealism. I wonder how long you'll keep to it."

"Why shouldn't I keep to it always?"

"Because it's so much easier to get it than keep it. You're going to be a big man—I'm not talking nonsense. There's nothing will stop you being that. People are going to run after you. You'll be asked about."

"I shall? I'm only a miller's son. What would people want to ask me about for?"

Here was the same steady balance of pride as when he had told Mrs. Baldwin his father was once a butler.

"That won't matter," said she; "they will. There's a large section of the so-called upper classes in London who like to feel the fringe of the garments of intellect. An actor makes a name, a writer, an artist, a musician, and they like him to be seen in their houses. The hostess wears him like a new dress while his popularity lasts. She hangs the fringe of his intellect over her ankles, just as she would a new skirt, and as if she were saying, 'How do you like me in this?' When his popularity is gone she discards him—like an old skirt, too. But your name won't go under unless you become like so many of the other clever men one sees."



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"What do they become?"

"Spoilt—ruined. Society's no forcing-house for intellect or art. It chokes it. The smart conversations at week-end dinner-tables—there's nothing in them. It's all as empty as champagne bubbles. And yet it has that illusion in it which makes a man think he's in touch with the world. He meets politicians—who are in the public eye. And where there are politicians, the talk is of politics. He imagines he is hearing what the country is doing, is getting glimpses behind the scenes, when all the time he's merely hearing their selfish little aims and selfish little objects. Every man for his party; which, since politics have become a trade, means every man for himself. Pure unadulterated selfishness is writing history now. That's all you hear in Society, but at the expense of being made one of the selfish ones yourself. There are few men I've ever met, men promising literary greatness, men promising greatness in art, promising some big future or other, who haven't been poisoned by it in time. All these people with money and no brains, who pick up their cleverness from the brains of those they can afford to entertain—these are the people, and, not really them, but their money, that is poisoning the minds which might otherwise have achieved. Every man turns his brains now to money, and when they've become nothing, but the weight of gold in his head, he sinks out of sight like a weighted sack. That's the last of him."

He had let her speak on, feeling it was true, but



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never realising it was prophecy. Here was a quality of intelligence in a woman he had never met before; here, indeed, he had encountered a mind to throw his own against.

"Do you always talk this sort of wisdom?" he asked with a smile.

"No, never. I talk the smart, empty stuff they all talk. With them it's generally repetition of what they've heard said by others smarter than themselves."

"It isn't with you," he declared.

"I hope it isn't. But I talk it just the same. They don't understand people saying what they think. I don't suppose I should understand it either if I heard it in their dining-rooms and drawing-rooms. It's only out here on this hillside, with that stretch of country in front of one, with your incessant note of music in one's ears, that one can talk simply what one really thinks. It seems right enough here—indeed, the only sort of thing to say."

There was the bitterness of youth in her voice; that bitterness which has come to the realisation of the hypocrisy in life.

"Why don't you give it up then?" said he. "You can see through it all—the empty sham of it. Sit on the hillside for the rest of your life, instead of on an armchair in a drawing-room. Drink this sort of wine you're breathing now instead of champagne. Listen to this sort of music instead of the paid performer who's turning his brains into money. If



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you hate it all as you seem to, why not give it up? I'm going to ask an impertinent question."

She nodded her head. There was her permission. She gave it.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

That was the question she had expected—impertinent enough, indeed, when a woman is over thirty. But she would have answered to him and the truth, whatever age she had been.

"Well, you're young enough," said he. "Why not give it up?"

She tried to laugh, and with the amusement in life that he had first seen in her. But the humour was not really there.

"You don't follow it all," said she. "I've been brought up to it. It's my staple food. And it's not only that. What should I do if I did give it up? You can sit on a hillside and do nothing—for a morning, yes; but not for a lifetime. You've got your work. You've got something to do that's worth doing. You've got a meaning in life; there's a meaning expressing itself in you. There's no such expression in me. I hunt and dance in the winter; I go to theatres, and so on, in the season. I go abroad to play golf and gamble, and through it all there's amusement to be found. People are contemptible, but they're very funny over it. I can always see that. They always make me laugh. There's only one real thing in which I take an interest."



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"What's that?"

"Boxing—prize-fighting. My father's keen on it. He takes me down to the Ring in the Blackfriar's Road. I can get out of myself there. There I can see men doing the things they mean to do. People lift up their eyes in horror when I tell them I go there. Not that they're really shocked, but they think it's so unintellectual. They don't seem to realise that in the prize-ring men are using their wits and their cleverness in a cleaner and more honest way than any one of your famous party politicians. It may not be a high standard of intelligence—the boxer's—but it's clean and it's honest. I wouldn't miss a good fight for the world."

All this was strange and new and wonderful to Dicky. But her intelligence was not all; indeed, between a man of Dicky's age and a woman of hers, intelligence plays only a part. It was a factor, but no more, in all that was to follow.

For this was more than mere adventure to Dicky. Here, and soon enough he was to know it, was the romance of the princess in his life—the unattainable which will attract the spirit of any man. He was watching every feature, observing every expression in the animation of her face as she talked. It all stimulated him to the consciousness of the blood in his veins, the power of his body, the activity of his mind. She made him feel alive and a braggart of it, too. And yet he had not dreamed of telling himself that it was love. The first physical subjugation of it had swept away all power of thought. She



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had called it adventure, and so far he was content with that.

Only this much he knew and could reason with himself. It was not the last time they would meet. It was, indeed, only the beginning of the many times when they would see each other. Beyond that there was the day, the time of the year, that hillside sloping to the luscious valley far below, and her beside him. He asked for nothing more.

For almost another hour they sat and talked, each finding in the other some unexpected interest that set their hearts beating to a quicker pulse. To her he was the new, the conquering mind, unblemished by veneer, unspoil't by social hypocrisies. She saw the unbridled power of emotion in his eyes, admired his broad simplicity, revered his intellect. This was the fairy prince to her who had met real princes, and counted them beneath him in every measurement of men.

"There's no inducement, then," he said at last, "that would make you give up this kind of life, for which you've nothing but contempt? Whatever was offered you instead, you'd still keep to what you have?"

She shrugged her shoulders on which her head and neck were set so well.

"I'd have no choice," said she.

"Why not?"

She stretched out her left hand before his eyes. He saw the wedding ring that bound her finger. No other ring was there.



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"You're married!" he murmured.

And then she knew, far better than he, the thoughts subconscious in his mind.

"Hadn't you guessed that?"

"No."

"Hadn't you seen my ring?"

"I'd noticed your right hand when you put it to your hair—I'd noticed what a wonderful hand it was. I hadn't noticed your left."

He hardly tried to conceal what a shock it was to him. It might almost have been told that he had told her then and she had refused the offer of his love. The simple obviousness of it almost forced a tremor in her voice when she spoke again.

"Have you ever heard of Lord Freddy Charteris?"

Vaguely he had. Vaguely he admitted it.

"Well—he's my husband."

CHAPTER X

LADY DIANA was returning immediately to London. The season had begun. In three more days, having completed all arrangements for the building of his studio, Dicky followed her. Mr. Furlong was to superintend the work in the Mill. This was occupation for him. In Mrs. Flint's charge, Dicky left young Harry, now happy enough to be anywhere with her, Mrs. Baldwin and her return from buying oil and candles for the shop



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becoming more and more idle a speculation in his mercurial mind as the delicious day went by.

Something, Mrs. Flint devined, had happened to Dicky in those last few days. His restlessness was not the natural motion of an active mind. For some days he had seemed unsettled; at last depressed. In some way she connected it with their visit to Woolas Hall, and this was not merely the instinct of a woman. It had been from that day his restlessness had become apparent. But what had happened since? How could anything have taken place? What opportunity could have offered?

Yet, on the day of his leaving, she asked him what was the matter, proving, when he thought of it, how closely she must watch him.

"There's nothing," said he. "I want to get back to work, I suppose—that's all.

She had inclined her head to his answer, conscious that she must be content to bide her time. But at the door, as she took his hand on the moment of his going, she looked steadily into his eyes.

"Tell me all about yourself, Dicky," she said quietly. "There's no one more interested in you or your work than I am. Don't ever forget that. When you're doing big things up in the bustle of London, remember me down here in the quiet of the Mill. I want to hear everything, good or bad."

His fingers closed warmly over hers.

"That doesn't mean a regular weekly letter, does it?" he asked with a smile. "You know the kind of correspondent I am."

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"No—the letter when you feel inclined—that's all."

Mrs. Samby had the studio all ready for him when he returned. Her face was wreathed with smiles as she met him at the top of the stairs; she was full of anticipation of the days of laughter that were to come, but in a moment knew that there would be no laughter that day.

"Me and my daughter have been here every day tidyin' up," said she, as she followed his eyes round the room. "There ain't a speck o' dirt anywhere."

"No—it looks splendid," said Dicky; but he was proud of it no more. Dissatisfaction with everything had settled like a shadow on his mind. For some days he moved in that shadow, chilled by it, unable to dispel it from his thoughts. Fanny came every morning, as usual, to the studio, out of the corner of her eye seeing him at work in desultory manner at his easel, well aware, though she knew nothing about it at all, that little work was being done. She waited patiently for the day, expecting it every morning, when he should make her laugh again; but the day was long in arriving.

Offers there were from Rheinhardt and Guernani—plenty of other dealers, too. There was no lack of work to be done, added to which there were all the preparations for his show in the Rheinhardt galleries. He worked, it is true, but with no heart or joy in it. For three weeks this despondency clung to him like a garment that is wet. He would not admit it to himself that he was in love and in a



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hopeless cause. He would not even allow that Lady Diana in any way was at the heart of his depression. So it continued with him, insistent, monotonous, because, for the time, he could not find the initiative in himself to concede that he was faced with the defeat of his desires.

They had parted that day on Bredon Hill, consenting, but with no definite agreement as to time or place, that they should meet again in London. He had not taken her address, nor did she know of his. But her whereabouts were easily found. Purchasing a Blue Book, he had found the name of Lord Frederic Charteris, with the address in Hans Crescent but had never dared to write there.

It had been an adventure, he thought continuously—that morning on Bredon Hill. She had admitted it herself. He was only the son of a miller—what more could she want of him than their conversation, which had wiled away the time for her that day. If she had really admired his work so much, might she not have arranged for him to paint her portrait? Willingly, gladly he would have done it, and for the joy of doing it alone.

There were many sheets of paper in his sketch-books, canvasses in his studio, too, with memory portraits of her, all of them bringing him bitter dissatisfaction when compared with the vision he had of her in his mind.

But he had seen the last of her. He was sure of that. She had gone back to the social interests for which she had professed so much contempt.



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It had been a glimpse into a new world—wonderful enough—but it was not his own. As she had wisely said—society was not a forcing-house for art. In time he would have accepted that, found content with it, readjusted his mind, and have settled down to work again; but one morning to his bedside Fanny brought a letter. On the back of the envelope was a coronet in black.

“It’s something to do with his Majesty’s Service,” she thought—“income tax or somethin’, that’s what it is,” and she kept an eye on him while he opened and read it. She calculated it was one of those distressing communications which had no good effect upon those who received them. He would be worse after this. But to her surprise he was not. He was better. In a few moments he was calling out for hot water, moreover, with the old and eager note in his voice, in which there was no mistaking the lifting of his spirits.

The letter was, of course, from Lady Diana. Mrs. Flint, wondering and speculating upon many things, had forwarded it to him from the Mill. There was nothing but her instinct to go upon, yet her mind stretched out, feeling in the darkness and finding the truth of the matter, as women do.

“Dear Mr. Furlong”—he read the letter there at once, and read it again while he was at his breakfast—

I am addressing this to Trafford Mill, because you never gave me the address of your studio in Town, and have so far, apparently, kept yourself out of *Who’s Who*. Why



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haven't you written to me? My whereabouts were not so difficult to find. If this reaches you by Wednesday will you come to tea on that day—here—I shall be in in any case, and looking forward, if you receive this in time, to meeting you again. Yours sincerely,

DIANA CHARTERIS.

It was Wednesday then. He looked at the clock as he finished reading it for the second time. It was half-past nine. He finished his breakfast and went to work with energy revived by so simple an incident as this.

"I was afraid that letter was from the income tax, Mr. Furlong," said Fanny, knowing well enough now she could say what she liked.

"No, Fanny," he turned to her with the old twinkle in his eye, whereupon she got ready to be amused. "It was from the King, asking me to join him in a snack of fish at Lockhart's."

This was foolish enough, the cheapest form of wit; but the sort of humour he knew Fanny appreciated.

"How droll to be sure!" she exclaimed, and hung on to the handle of her scullery door—laughing for the first time in three weeks.

What evolution of circumstance he expected from this second meeting, Dicky gave no thought to consider. He was to see her again and on her own invitation. This was all he needed to lift his spirits. All that morning he worked on a new wood-block from sketches he had made abroad, and in



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the afternoon set off at half-past three for Hans Crescent.

This side of London was a new world to him. 'All that Lady Diana had said on Bredon Hill came back to his mind in penetrating remembrance. He knew his work would never be spoilt by the sycophancy of the artist in Society or the flattery of Society, apeing an intelligence it did not possess. Apart from Lady Diana, he felt nothing but contempt for their powdered flunkeyism and the emptiness of their lives, of which at the best they could but make a fleeting entertainment.

He thought of his work as he had believed politicians thought of their country until Lady Diana's abuse of them. But of any aspect of life, except his own, he had as yet all the innocence of a child. Never regularly in his life had he read a newspaper. Politics, until then, were a province in which, had he considered them at all, he was content to let honest men live up to their ideals, serving their country. Connecting them with a business in life had never occurred to him.

In his world, indeed, politics were never talked. So much had he kept himself aloof from life in general that he had imagined merchants to be the only men whose object was the making of money. This was the real idealism in him which Lady Diana had seen. He knew enough about that; was not wanting for one instant in intelligence upon his own point of view. Indeed, he could defend it, and with deeper logic than were in any of the specious



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arguments which might have been flung against him.

But as yet he was scarcely on the threshold of this new world, having no absolute convictions that men were as ready to turn their brains to gold as Lady Diana had suggested. He was, in fact, that very day as a simple traveller coming into a new country with keen, yet unenlightened, eyes, to mark all the strange and unaccustomed things he saw.

Setting out from the studio in Ridinghouse Street, it had not entered his head that there were clothes properly to be worn for such an occasion as this. Of two suits in his possession he had put on the best. This was in consideration for Lady Diana, not of her surroundings. He had been conscious of care in the tying of his tie; aware of a little more consideration in the brushing of his hair. But this was all. His hat he had stuck on his head regardless of what disarrangement it might make.

That day on Bredon Hill, she had been dressed in a loose skirt and blouse. A large soft hat, becomingly shapeless was on her head. He still had that picture of her in his mind. It was only when the butler opened the door of the house in Hans Crescent, when he saw the immaculate dress of the man and the dimly-lighted hall stretching far behind him into the distance, that he realised the clothes he wore himself.

Imperturbable though the butler's face was, Dicky could see surprise behind the mask.

"Is Lady Charteris at home?" he asked—stumbling on the word; for in the first instant he had



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almost omitted her title and realised the shame he would have felt had he indeed said Mrs. Charteris.

The butler commanded the centre of the doorway, and did not move from there until he had asked what name.

"Mr. Furlong."

"Will you come upstairs, sir? Her ladyship is in the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XI

IT was a large house. A broad staircase rose out of the capacious hall, winding to a dimly-lighted gallery above. On the walls, big pictures were hung—all portraits, none too well painted. In the hall stood a massive piece of furniture, handsomely alone. All the walls were white, all the doors a rich and polished Spanish mahogany. They were all closed. The silence of the house as he followed the butler up the heavily-carpeted stairs beat upon Dicky's brain. He could feel his heart hammering within him; it almost seemed that he could hear it, too.

This was not awe, but confusion. He felt out of place. He knew his clothes must look ridiculous. Moreover, he could not believe that in the house he was about to meet her whom last he had seen on the far hill in Gloucestershire. With every step he took up that silent staircase, the romance of it all seemed to be losing its buoyancy. A combination



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of circumstances had contrived to deceive him. This was no world of his; nor, had she been free, could he have ever hoped to enter it.

The butler threw open the mahogany door into the drawing-room, announcing his name. His face, as Dicky passed him, had the faint trace of human interest by reason of its impassive curiosity. But Dicky himself was past appreciating that. His heart was thumping again as Lady Diana came down the room to meet him. Here was the woman whose face had been living, importunately, in his mind for the last three weeks and more. She was a different creature now to when he had seen her on Bredon Hill. Instead of the loose skirt and blouse, she wore a graceful gown—a colour they call *tête de nègre*, where colours must be given names to please a woman's ear—and at her waist a red rose blent with purple.

He must have known that he preferred her countrywise; yet with his mind now trained and ever ready to see subjects for his brush, confusion and uneasiness were all caught up in admiration of the picture that she made. But as she shook hands with him embarrassment returned. At the far end of the room, standing beside the mantelpiece, was a man faultlessly attired in black tailed coat, his hands caught easily behind his back, watching Dicky with curious interest. And in those oppressive moments, so it seemed, a faint tremour of amusement, was on his lips.

These were the first impressions, and all com-



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pounded with confusion. Yet to those who had been waiting for his arrival scarce a trace of this embarrassment was apparent. Pride concealed it. What, after all, were clothes to be ashamed about. She had asked him there. She must take him as she found him. Indeed, so far from all uneasiness, his nervous mind had risen to defend itself and with aggression.

"I must introduce you to Sir William Gerrish," said Lady Diana, when Dicky met his eyes with the keen glance of the determination of his personality. Sir William was about to nod his head, but having made the first movement, Dicky compelled him to shake hands, wringing his fingers in a grip that would confess no nervousness.

"Are you ready for some tea?" asked Lady Diana, adding at once: "Sir William saw your 'Jade' in Paris, too. He admires it as much as I do—don't you?"

"Fine piece of work," said Sir William.

They were no less ill-at-ease than Dicky in his nondescript suit of gray; but whereas his was more a discomfort of body, sharp and distressing in his mind, theirs was the comfort of mind alone. They knew in their hearts it was not clothes that mattered; neither formality, nor propriety, or any of those qualities which distinguished them from such a man as Dicky. The real distinction lay between his intellect and theirs; and she at least, if not Sir William, frankly admitted in her heart where the advantage of that distinction should be found.



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It was she who made the conversation until the strain of those first few moments were passed, talking of the glories of Gloucestershire, concentrated in that neighbourhood of the Avon and Bredon Hill. So she drew in Sir William too; upon whom a silence had fallen since his first remark to Dicky, for he had been there at Woolas Hall with her.

"Great hunting in those parts." This was his first contribution to the general conversation. He was perfectly satisfied now—now that he knew absolutely what he was talking about. "How many days a week do you hunt when you're down there, Mr. Furlong?"

"None at all," said Dicky.

Sir William conveyed that he was too well-bred to show his surprise; as, indeed, he was. He imagined it to be a matter of expense. Until that moment, finding him in Lady Diana's drawing-room, he had forgotten that Dicky was only the son of a miller. Undoubtedly it was a matter of expense, and that was a pity because he could have talked about hunting. He had more hunting stories at his fingers' ends—polite and otherwise—than any man in town. It was a pity. To just tail off the conversation, he added: "Great hunting country—that. What do you do then when you're down at Bredon?"

There was no doubt some country pursuit he followed in which Sir William could engage him in conversation, even if it were only running with the



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beagles. There was no expense attached to that. He must employ his time some way or another.

"I work," said Dicky.

"Work? But I—I thought you had your studio up in London?"

"Yes; I have. But one doesn't want a studio always to work in. I hate studio work. You can nearly always tell it—no fresh air in it. Nobody can devise Nature. God isn't in the studio. There, a man's alone with his own wits, and they aren't enough. You aren't going to find many artists to admit it, but it's true. Go in for that sort of work in London and in time you turn your studio into a drawing-room, fit to have tea in. They call it work."

Dicky was flinging out into the things he knew of. The intelligent expression on Sir William's face consequent of their talk about hunting had resolved itself into vacancy. He knew nothing about God in the studio—or anywhere else, for that matter. He would not have cared to have to disprove the existence of a God, but a shrewd suspicion was in his mind, owing to a long absence of any acquaintance with religion, that there was no God—not worth talking about, anyhow.

Lady Diana saw the look in his eyes, knowing well into what kind of difficulties he would soon be drifting. There was no stopping this young man, with his enthusiasm and his energy. What was more, she wanted him to herself. A glance at Sir William was sufficient. He made a movement to go.



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"Not going to wait for tea?" she asked.

He thanked her, but—no. Indeed, this had all been arranged beforehand.

"Who do you think is coming to see me this afternoon?" she had asked him soon after his arrival. There was no guessing at that until she had reminded him of the picture she had taken him herself to see in the Salon. Her curiosity had been roused about the artist then and he knew her intellectual habits well enough to suppose that she would make the acquaintance of Richard Furlong, whoever he might be, sooner or later.

So now she had done it, and he was amused to know how. She told him the whole story, catching the spirit of adventure in her phrases, darting it from her eyes.

"Well, now," he had said, "you wouldn't take as much interest in a fella like me. I'm not brainy enough, I suppose, that's what it is. But d'you know, I'm always meaning to read up things, only I don't know what sort of books I ought to get. I can talk politics—that I can do. Any politics that affect my little bit of land down in Somerset, I can talk with the best of them. But questions of education, and all this intellectual business, that's beyond me. Mind you, I'm interested in it right enough; but it's beyond me. Of course, what you seen in this miller's son—of course, I know he's clever—that picture was a ripper—he's clever, right enough, but he can't be a gentleman. Going to let me stop and look him over? I should like to



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see the fella, because he can paint. I'd say that about him to anyone."

She had leant back in her chair, letting her voice go to laughter. The blood had burnt under his well-tanned cheeks. He had pulled at his moustache; but he did not mind. Everybody laughed at him; everybody nowadays was so damned clever. Wherever he went in Society there were these writing-men, politicians, actors, and so on, all of whom could talk, till he did not know where he was. They talked of their own jobs, too. Everyone seemed to expect that they should, and that had him at a disadvantage. Not one of them knew anything about horses or the land—not that he knew very much—but he did pick up a bit of it from his steward down in Somerset.

"You can laugh," he had said; "I'm not clever like you. But these fellas beat me. I should have thought their job was enough without them coming round to people's houses, talking about it. If they write books, then you read 'em; and if they paint pictures, then you go and see 'em; and if they act, well, hang it, let 'em act. What they ought to do is to keep to 'emselves, and talk to people who can understand what they're talking about."

Her laughter had suddenly subsided.

"But you *are* clever, my dear Willie," she said. "That's absolutely right. That's what they ought to do. And here's this boy—he's not much more than a boy—just on the very edge of things. I



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know just what'll happen to him if he doesn't meet the right person."

"And you're going to be the right person," said Gerrish, quite unable to express it, but knowing that that meant Lady Diana was going to keep him to herself.

"Yes, I'm going to be that. You can stop and see him, but you must go soon after he's come."

So he had gone, and at the right moment; just when the cleverness of the "fella" was coming out and he was in danger of being swept beyond his depth.

When the door had closed, even Lady Diana herself would have found it difficult to define the multitude of expressions which combined in one smile upon her face. Confused even in the consciousness of her own feelings, she just said the first things that came to her lips.

"There now," said she; "you've seen a specimen of the people I know, and he's one of the very best of them. I've known him for years. He's very well off, frightfully unselfish, and sometimes, out of the sheer simpleness of his stupidity, comes an almost wise remark. He's not the most excellent specimen you could have seen. He never pretends for a moment to be clever. In fact, he doesn't like clever people as the others do."

"Why does he go to the Salon then?" asked Dicky.

"For the same reason that he liked your 'Jade.'"

"Why was that?"

"Because I told him he ought to. I remember

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what he said about it before we went—"Is it something I ought to be able to talk about?" That's what he asked me when I took him to see 'Jade.' When I told him it was, he came as obediently as a child, and I told him all the things he ought to say."

"You're his liberal education."

"Something like that. Now tell me why you haven't written. Too hard at work, I suppose. D'you never stop?"

"No; I haven't been working so hard. In fact, I've found it difficult to do anything these last three weeks. I didn't write because I didn't really know you wanted to see me again."

"But we arranged a meeting."

"Only vaguely—nothing definite about it. Then, you see, it was very different there on the side of that hill to what it is here"—he looked about him—"in this drawing-room."

"How different?"

"Well, that was an adventure—didn't you say so?—and a proper place for it, too. I wouldn't ask a better."

"Nor I," said she, and brought the memory of it there that he might see it in her eyes.

"Well," he continued, "this is no proper place. How was I to know that you really did want to turn an adventure into an acquaintance? I don't want to harp on it—but I'm only a miller's son."

She let a light of annoyance in her eyes, when to any other than he, she might have smiled.



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"Do you think I'm a snob then?" she asked, so that he must give a direct answer to her question.

"No; far from it. But once upon a time, my father held the same position as your butler who showed me in here, wearing much better clothes than I've got on."

She leant back laughing heartily. Then it was driven to his mind how beautiful she was.

"That's quite nice of you," said she. "I'm sure I'm quite right in all my imagination about you. Do you think Hills could produce a son with your genius? And if he could, do you think it would make any difference that Hills was our butler?"

"Yes; a lot," said Dicky. "Imagine Hills showing his own son into your drawing-room. Who would you first shake hands with—Hills or his son?"

She leant a little nearer to him, serious now because she knew the truth of what he said.

"Are you going to persist in this idea?" said she; "because you're foolish if you do. You and your father are two different people"—he smiled at the unconscious truth of that—"your intellect is you, and that lifts you above any of the people you'll meet here in my drawing-room.

So she laid the first seeds of that fruit whose poison she had warned him of.

"Why haven't you been working lately?" she went on; "has anything gone wrong?"

He looked straight at her with the inclination to tell her the truth, and knowing that he was about to speak it.



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"Yes; something was all wrong with me."

"What?"

"I wanted to see you again, and—and—I thought that day on Bredon Hill had been the last of it."

With anyone else again she would have laughed. He had struggled to keep the intensity out of his voice; but she had heard the distant ring of it. With him she seemed to lose desire to control emotion; with him, in some strange way, she felt nearer to life, less compelled to simulate emotions that she did not feel.

"Well, as far as I was concerned," said she quietly, "I meant to see you again. Would you like to ring that bell, and we'll have some tea."

CHAPTER XII

FROM Lady Diana came the first suggestion that he should paint her portrait. For the first half-hour that he was there alone with her, he was trying to find the courage to ask here—ready to do it without question of terms, yet fearful lest she should find him taking advantage of her acquaintance. She went to the matter of terms at once. There was no need of delicacy for her. She had none of those false sentiments about work being paid for or the niceties to be observed. Enough of them paid for titles, and a portrait by him was better than any baronetcy.

"I want a full-length one—really big—something



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in which you can have all the scope you want. What do you ask for a full-length portrait?" She saw the colour begin its mounting to his cheeks. "Now I'm not going to have any of that nonsense," said she smiling. "You're not a slave to any master—you're a worker; the best type of man there is. I'm a Socialist; come along, tell me. There's no such thing as unremunerated fame nowadays. It's no good working for it. A man does a brave deed and goes on the music halls at a hundred pounds a week. So do the boxers, I'm sorry to say. As if a good fight well won was not payment enough. Now, I'm not going to use any more persuasion. You've got to tell me."

Dicky sat there smiling.

"A few moments ago," said he, "I was trying to summon up my courage to ask you to let me do it for nothing."

"I wouldn't hear of it."

"Ah, but don't you see the help it would be to me; 'Lady Diana Charteris,' by Richard Furlong—the R.A. couldn't refuse it. As a portrait painter I should get the chance of my life."

"What do you ask for a full-length portrait?" she repeated.

"Well, I suppose the same as I got for 'Jade.' "

"It ought to be more now. But how much was that?"

"Two hundred pounds."

"Two hundred pounds! That picture for two hundred pounds! Who bought it for that?"



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"Monsieur de Rambouillet."

"A Frenchman! Ah, they know what they're about. We're like a lot of kittens. They saw Whistler before our eyes were open."

She said no more about prices then, but made up her mind to a larger figure than that. They talked of the portrait it was going to be.

"A portrait that's going to live," said she.

He had nothing to say to that, but stipulated for the dress she was wearing then.

"You like it?"

It was a new sensation having her dresses noticed by a man. The look of envy in a woman's eyes, that was frequent enough. It was not everything.

"What that dress would look like," he exclaimed, "if this room were papered in a dull gold and furnished in black lacquer!"

It was convincing enough to make her then and there discontented with her drawing-room.

They arranged that she should sit in his studio.

"No place to give tea-parties in," said he; "but I can work there."

Then, turning to talk about his work, she found the futurist spirit in him, leavened with sanity and steeped in a beauty comprehensible to the minds of anyone.

"It's the things you know as well as see that are beautiful. It's the subconscious mind—the other fella—who's got to do all the real work for you. Putting the paint on, arranging the composition, creating the scheme, those are the conscious things you



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come to do in time by instinct. Once you get it to that, it's the other fella who does all the work. He's not a craftsman. Once they're done you leave the job to him. Most of the time Whistler was too conscious. An arrangement in black—there's the very confession of it. There's no unconsciousness about arrangement."

He was the first person she had heard who dared to criticise Whistler; what was more, there seemed to be truth in what he said. She recalled the portrait of Sir Henry Irving as Philip II. of Spain, the portrait of Mrs. Louis Huth, both of them so-called arrangements in black, and then compared them with the unconscious beauty of that picture of his—"The Last of Old Westminster"—where the arrangement was little of his making, not enough in any case to keep him conscious of what he did. It was true what Dicky said; it was not in a man to be unconscious in what he confessed was an arrangement—not in Whistler, anyhow.

"How are you going to lose sight of your consciousness over this portrait?" she asked.

"I don't know if I am; but if I don't, I know it won't be worth seeing when it's done."

"But how do you think you're going to do it? What I want to know is how you set to work about it."

He shrugged his shoulders for the want of words.

"If it's unconscious to me, how can I consciously describe it? I can't. It's just a getting away from the thing one sees in front of one, but feeling something,

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something almost like an emotion in the back of your mind, something that even makes your heart beat quicker and the blood burn hotter in your veins, and painting that—expressing what it means, making it come out on the canvas so that you can see there in front of you the thing out of your hidden mind, the thing you'd never known was there until that moment."

Outwardly she smiled at his struggle for his words, yet inwardly there was nothing but astonishment in her mind, and the realisation of the power of emotion he must have.

"It was that, I suppose," she said, "that made you able to paint the incessant note of music that morning on Bredon Hill. What is the painting of me, I wonder, going to discover for you in your unconscious mind? I know what it discovered when you painted 'Jade.' "

"What?"

"That knowledge of women I told you about. I'm beginning to think now that you don't consciously know anything about them at all."

He admitted that readily enough.

"I've no pretensions that way," said he.

She sat there looking at him for a long, long while in silence. Had there been uneasiness between them something must have been said. It was not even discomfort of mind when at last he inquired why she looked at him so long.

"I know all sorts of people," she replied with frank admission, "and I don't know anyone of them



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who interests me as much as you do. I wonder how far you'll go—I wonder how big'll be the best that you can do?"

Had she not been so young, she might have thought twice before she spoke such praise as that. But there was the youth of enthusiasm in her as well. He made her feel the point of life, and she was young enough to desire to pierce her flesh with it.

They both of them were young; he young enough to take it all as it was meant, hearing the ring of energy in her voice. Another few years he might have seen the flattery of it alone, believing the big things were already done.

"Well, I've never met anyone," said he, "who made me feel I was going to do the big things like you do."

This was almost young enough to be folly, and there is no knowing what it might not have become had it not ceased at that moment. The door at the far end of the drawing-room opened. Lord Freddy Charteris looked in.

CHAPTER XIII

THE first threads woven by Destiny in the foundation of the pattern she intends, are so quietly and so carelessly set upon the loom that no one dreams of their inception. Neither Dicky nor Lord Freddy in that first moment were aware of the touch of the hand of Fate which had brought them thus together.

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"One of Diana's cranks," Lord Freddy said to himself when he saw Dicky's nondescript suit of grey, observing with the ever-conscious sense of his superiority that nervous awkwardness as Dicky rose to his feet.

But at once the impression made upon Dicky's mind was more virile and more definite than this. He saw before him a man of forty years of age or so, dressed in the height of fashion; wearing the expression of that well-bred, even good-natured insolence and contempt for everyone below his own rank in life. Though in the height of fashion, his clothes suggested some period other than his own. "In me," he seemed to be saying in his appearance, even in the attitude he chose as he stood at the door, "In me you can imagine my grandfather—the fifth Earl of Mas-siter." If it so happened that you could not imagine the fifth earl, the pity was for you.

As he stood at the door, he fixed a gold-rimmed monocle in his eye and seemed with a keen humour to be studying the situation. Lady Diana turned in her chair and smiled at him. In three years she had learnt the meaning of that quizzical expression and the use to which that monocle was put. He was thinking of nothing. Dicky's suit of grey had arrested his attention. He thought no more of what it meant than a horse considers the meaning of a fluttering piece of paper he shies at in the road.

"One of Diana's cranks," he said to himself. The apparent significance of his expression contained in it no more thought than that. But for that expres-



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sion alone, swift in his judgments and swifter still in his emotions, Dicky sowed the first seed of hatred of Lord Freddy Charteris in his mind.

With a movement of his eyebrow at last he let the monocle fall, closed the door, and came forward into the room.

"Well, Diana, my dear, am I disturbing your tea-party?"

She knew well that curiosity had brought him there. Her cranks, as he always called them, often amused and always interested him. He admired her, he said, for keeping in touch with all the movements; incidentally, it saved him the trouble of reading about them himself, and anything but a French novel or something in English that could be recommended, he hated reading.

Sometimes her cranks were useful. A painter man she had brought to the house had let him come and sit in his studio while he was at work on a model—quite amusing. He understood it was not the custom. The model's permission had to be asked first; but he was the eldest son of the fifth Earl of Massiter. He had never anticipated her refusal. Indeed, his anticipations in life were seldom disappointed. In that respect he had been unfortunate. A superfluity of chances in this world have the effect of neutralising one another. Lord Freddy had had every advantage in life but that one advantage of having no chance at all. In these circumstances he had suffered more than most men. He was insufferable.

A few weeks of married life had shown Lady Diana

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how insufferable he was; it had taken her three years with all her buoyancy of spirits and determined zest for life to admit and to forget it.

"A coronet doesn't conceal a cad," she had once said to herself after one of their interchanges of words. She had said it alone, not only in the silence of her own room, but in the deeper silence of her heart. But once having spoken that word cad, and once having acknowledged it, matters became easier then. She proceeded forthwith to forget it, going her own way and with the people of her own choosing.

Gossip was talked and rumours were about in those days connecting her name once with this man—a great sculptor—and again with that—a famous barrister. Possibly they were true, but she faced them out. The men still dined in Hans Crescent, were seen down in the country for week-ends at Bembridge. No one dared to speak things openly, and only when Lord Freddy was incensed at the discovery of his own misdemeanors did he fling their names in her face. He was sorry the next moment that he had done it—sorry for himself. She had a cutting wit and a lively temper well within control. With such qualities words can be said, a lash to every one of them.

His amiable inquiry that afternoon, and the insolence with which he ignored Dicky once he had inspected him through his monocle, concealed, she knew, not only curiosity but that ugly suspicion with which he regarded all her friends.

"Disturbing the tea-party?" said she. "My dear



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Freddy, we're delighted. Let me introduce you—this is Mr. Furlong, Mr. Richard Furlong—you remember 'Jade' in the Salon. He's going to paint my portrait. I'm going to have a good one done at last."

She described to him the scheme which had already been debated on. "This dress—a gold background with a piece of black lacquer furniture—I suggest a screen," she added, "hiding my disillusions."

"I should like to know what disillusions you have," said Lord Freddy.

"Many, my dear Freddy—that's why the screen will be so apt. I hide them all."

He knew what she meant; was conscious, aggressively so, of all that she found in him and judged her wrongly and bitterly when he believed her ready to let the whole world know of it.

"A most successful concealment," said he. "I never see any trace of 'em. But have your screen by all means—it hides all sorts of things."

He laughed gleefully, more than satisfied to have cut a shaft of his own with her. The laugh was not deep in his throat, by which you know a man with a taste for the humours of life, but thin and between the teeth—a travesty of laughter. Dicky heard the satirical note in it and rose to go. No pleasure was left for him there in that room with her then.

Lady Diana rang the bell.

"Then when do we begin?" said she.

"Just as soon as you like. I'm as keen as I can be."

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She consulted her engagement book, while Dicky waited in silence and Lord Freddy munched cakes by himself at the tea-table.

"To-morrow?" said she. "Too soon is it?"

"What time?" He was thinking of a canvas to be bought, of things to do in the studio before she saw it.

"Any time you like."

"The afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then three o'clock."

He could not bring himself to lose even a day. As his hand touched Lord Freddy's he felt the repulsion of hatred again, was glad to rid himself of it with the touch of those fingers of hers.

Then he had gone.

CHAPTER XIV

A SEVEN-FOOT canvas was bought and stretched that afternoon. Once flung into the ambition to paint a great portrait, Dicky would not suppress his ideas. He let them have full rein. He bought new brushes; laid in a stock of paints, more expensive than he had ever used before. If it was to be done, it was to be done well.

When Fanny came the next morning he was already up and dressed. She did not conceal her astonishment, guessing readily enough that something unusual was in the air.



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"I'm going to Covent Garden before the market closes," said he, "to get some flowers."

"Oh, that will be nice!" said she, loving flowers as women love babies, perhaps because they have to be looked after. Besides which, she conceived it was to be a day in a thousand, and while he was gone tidied up the studio, putting the "Winged Victory," a statuette of which stood prominently in the room, safely away into a cupboard where it would not be seen.

Dicky returned in half an hour with an armful of crimson roses, having been observed and smiled at by every little girl he had passed going to her business.

"Wonderful the way a girl will smile at you," said he, "when you've got your arms full of flowers," and laid the whole bundle of them down on the table.

Fanny was in her element arranging them. She wanted to put them all in the water ewer from his washhandstand and place them on the middle of the table.

"I've been tidyin' up, Mr. Furlong," she said expectantly, and waited, not only for approval, but to hear for what reason these exertions of hers had been necessary.

"That's splendid," said Dicky, and looked round the room. "Where's the 'Winged Victory'?"

"The what, sir?"

"The 'Winged Victory.' The little statue thing that stood on the chest over there."

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"I put it away, Mr. Furlong—I put it away in the cupboard."

"Why?"

"Well, 'aven't you got somebody comin' to see you?"

"Yes; what's that got to do with it?"

"Well, I thought you wouldn't care for 'em to see a silly old broken thin' like that. Somebody's smashed the 'ead off of it. I'm sure I didn't, Mr. Furlong."

"No," said Dicky, "that was done before you came."

To Fanny's disgust the "Winged Victory" was brought out of her hiding place and set up again in state; with one thing and another the studio was made to look as it had never looked before.

"Flowers do make a difference to a place, don't they, Mr. Furlong," said Fanny; and at last her curiosity was gratified when he told her that Lady Diana Charteris was coming to have her portrait painted. Hearing this, a solemnity settled in her face and she became very silent, feeling that anything suggested by her on such an occasion would be out of place. Nevertheless, she stayed on an hour longer than her scheduled time, cleaning paint-work, she said, but in reality playing her cards for a glimpse of the Lady Diana.

At two o'clock hunger defeated her. She slipped on her cloak and disappeared disconsolated down the stairs, leaving Dicky at the arrangement of his background. All that morning he had scoured London



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for a black lacquer screen, and for some material the dull tone of gold that he had needed. A brocade had been found at last; the dim pattern of it he has just indicated in the portrait. With all these preparations made he walked up and down the studio, listening at every turn for the sound of her footsteps on the stairs when, hearing them at last, he found a consciousness of the quickening of his pulse, hurried to the door at the foot of the little flight of stairs, and stood there waiting for her.

"Now for the great picture," said she, smiling, thrilling the energy in him to begin. The joy of having her there and alone, of working and in her company; but, most of all, of having for his subject a woman as beautiful as he found her to be, had brought him into a fine quality of excitement. He imbued her with the electrical nature of his enthusiasm.

When she had taken off her hat—a moment which, however brief, impressed him deeply because it made him feel as if she belonged the more to that room in which he lived—when she stood beside the black lacquer screen and in that dress with the purple rose at her waist; above all, against that background of gold, he let go all rein upon the expressions of his delight.

"I shall never have a chance like this again!" he exclaimed. "It makes the most wonderful subject I've ever seen. Nothing that I can do will ever reach the beauty of it. Just those three colours, the gold and the lacquer and the dress, and then that blot



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of purple and red. Lord! How ripping it'll be to do!"

"You don't say anything about the portrait or the poor sitter," she said with a laugh.

"It's a difficult thing," he confessed, "to tell a woman in cold blood that she's beautiful without seeming either a fool or a flatterer."

"That difficulty won't worry the woman," said she; "besides, is it cold blood? I've never seen anyone so excited in my life. It's absolutely refreshing to find as much energy as yours."

"You don't understand my expression — cold blood," he explained. "He must be in love with her; not just the heat of mere excitement."

"Oh, I see," said she, and wondered what quality it was in him which made her feel so close to all the emotional in life. Indeed, this it was, as well as the brilliance of his mind that made the attraction of him to her. In all her dealings with him, few though they had been up till then, Dicky had had this effect upon her. So much more than any of the men whom she knew, he made her conscious of her youth, her relation to life, and those energies of mind and body which are inseparable from youth.

It was no less the same with him, but whereas he controlled the direction of his energies, pressing them into the service and enthusiasm of his work, she had no such escape. Certainly, she was deeply interested in all he did; but deeper than that interest was the increasing knowledge that he had more power than anyone to bring her the full meaning of life.



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In half an hour from the moment she arrived, Dicky had arranged the scheme of the portrait. He sketched it roughly on paper, filling in with water-colours the vague impression of what the ultimate result would be. They sat over tea and discussed it.

From that rough sketch alone, she could see what his genius was going to make of the finished thing. Admiration—that fatal admiration which a woman can have for the masterful qualities of a man’s mind—was growing fast upon her. She knew his future better than he knew it himself, and when she told him that that studio in Ridinghouse Street was not good enough for him, she was thinking and speaking for him more than for herself. Yet for her own sake there was no little consideration. She found no pleasure in thinking of him there, alone, in the slums of Great Tichfield Street. There was a greatness in him in which, even then, she took a personal pride. That studio was no fit or proper place for it.

“Surely you don’t want me to have the drawing-room in St. John’s Wood,” he complained. “I’m no good at the tea-cup business. I want a studio to work in, not to entertain.”

“But the portraits—how about the portraits you’re going to do when this one makes the whole of London talk, and every woman is clamouring to sit for you.”

He laughed at the picture it pleased her to draw.

How did she know all London was going to talk about her picture? Because it was hers perhaps; but she was allowing something out of the ordinary in him to set their tongues in motion. He felt in himself



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that that ability was there; but how was she to know from that rough sketch what the finished picture was going to be?

"Besides," said he, "I'm not going to be a portrait painter. The man who does that flings himself body and soul into a groove. There's no getting him out of it. He's done for, so far as the making of pictures is concerned. He may have the most determined personality in the world, but pride won't let him lose his prices. It comes to doing what someone else wants you to. There's no chance for art in that."

A faint shadow of disappointment seemed to fall across her eyes, making them a deeper grey.

"What are you going to do then?" she asked.

"Keep myself a free man," said he. "Have a conscience unfettered to do the things I want to do. Painting portraits is a death-trap for men at my job."

"You can be a great portrait painter."

"For a few years, yes; and a great artist for a couple of portraits—all the rest of them are out of the groove you're lying in. Catching a likeness isn't art. It's photography. And that's all that's left to the portrait painter after a year or two's work. He makes money—that's the curse of the thing. Didn't you say so yourself?"

"Would you take another studio if I asked you to? If I knew of one and could get it for you? One of the old houses in Chelsea. Nothing of the drawing-room about it, but the kind of surroundings you ought to be in."



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"I couldn't afford a studio in Chelsea," said he, laughing. "What's the rent of it?"

"Only a hundred and forty a year. It belongs to Masterman—the sculptor. He's a great friend of mine. He's giving it up. A hundred and forty a year, that's all. You'll make five hundred out of this portrait alone."

"Who said so?"

"I say so—that's what I'm going to pay for it."

"You're going to do nothing of the kind."

She smiled. "There won't be any picture then if I don't. I paid six hundred to Barnett for his portrait of me. Not as large as this. Well, compare yourself with Barnett. He can get those prices. If you don't ask for them, you'll have to be given them—that's all. Now I can give you another hour if you want to put the figure in on the canvas. I must go at half-past five. And to-morrow morning you come and see that studio in Chelsea with me."

CHAPTER XV

THE portrait was finished at the Ridinghouse Street studio; but before the last sittings had been given, the lease of the Chelsea studio had been signed. This was the beginning of that downfall which Lady Diana had declared was the fate of all men of intellect in Society—the beginning of that downfall which she, herself, was the very person to bring about.



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The cost at which it was averted, achieving those last two years of labour in which the highest quality of all his work was done, that is the tragedy which will make the name of Richard Furlong stand out strangest and alone in all the history of art.

His show at the Rheinhardt galleries that autumn brought his name prominently enough before the London public. This was the first time that "Jade" had been seen by the great majority. "A triumph of simplicity," one paper said, while to another was left the opportunity of finding that Dicky knew the value of colour more than any living artist. "The green of the jade," it said, "surpasses the genius of Monticelli." By permission of Monsieur de Rambouillet, it was reproduced in many of the illustrated papers, and a magazine devoted to artists and their work came out with a long and flattering appreciation of his career. Mrs. Flint read it eagerly at home in the Mill.

But in the following year, when the portrait of Lady Diana Charteris was hung prominently on the Academy walls, then, as she had said, the whole of London was talking about him. It was, however, at Hans Crescent and down at Bembridge—Lord Freddy's country seat—that he was only to be met. Still contemptuous of social advantages, knowing their fatal influence upon his work, he refused all invitations but hers. For by now, admitting to himself the hopeless folly of it, he was in love; carried away on the flood of an emotion which, however disturbing and painful it may have been, at least made him feel



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that life was to be lived—that he, indeed, was living it.

So long, therefore, as it offered no hindrance to his work—and in those days, pursued with countless commission, he had no time to consider the possibility of idleness—he allowed himself the bitter pleasure of her companionship.

To one person only did he make confession of this hopeless attachment. This was Mrs. Flint. As soon as she heard of his enormous success in the Academy—the papers in Gloucestershire were full of it, boasting of their man—she scraped together what little money could be spared her and came up to London.

As soon as he knew of her arrival, Dicky refused to hear of the project of a cheap bedroom in Bayswater.

“You come and stay with me,” said he, “and for a week at least. Down at Eckington they talk of the wonders of London town—well, you shall see ‘em.”

The very first day, knowing nothing of that endeavour of hers to effect his meeting with Lady Diana, he took her to the Academy. The dense crowd of women in their season’s frocks; of men, too, with the most polite of expressions on their faces, impolitely pushing each other aside to see the famous portrait, brought, more than anything else, to the mind of Mrs. Flint, the knowledge of the name he had made for himself. And while it flattered Dicky, he was irritated to think he could not show it her in



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peace. Their chatter, too, the foolish criticisms that fell on his ears, made him turn away in disgust. It was the picture, not the crowds, he had brought her to see.

"Let's come back again," said he; and later on, when it chanced that the room was almost empty, they returned.

The moment she had seen it, the words rushed to her lips, "The woman at Woolas Hall."

"Do you mean to say you've recognised it from that one time you saw her?"

"I saw her two or three times," she replied, and then was silent, gazing at the portrait, incapable of appreciating its beauty in her instinctive knowledge of all that had taken place since he was last at Bredon.

"She sat for you, of course," she said presently.

"Yes; in the old studio in Ridinghouse Street."

"What's she like?"

"Like?" The colour flushed hot across his cheeks as it paled in hers. "Oh, she's delightful. A clever woman, too. She's really been a good friend to me."

"And her husband?"

Not even an outsider, far less Mrs. Flint, could have failed to observe the light that burnt on the instant in Dicky's eyes. Indeed, he had never been one to hide the expression of his emotions in his face.

"I don't care so much for him," he replied, but those were not the words of fit accompaniment for that one look in his eyes. She knew it then, if truly



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she had not known it on the first moment she had seen the portrait, and that evening, as they sat alone in the studio, looking over his numberless sketches, in many of which she recognised the face of Lady Diana again, she put the question straightly for his answering.

"Dicky," said she, "aren't you in love?"

He had supposed it hidden, even from her and looked amazed that she had guessed it. But there it was; it was true enough, and a comfort, as he found it, to tell it her.

"She knows nothing," said he. "I'm not such a fool as to speak about it. So long as I can see her as often as I do, I suppose I must find gratitude somewhere for that. I'm not going to put an end to it by being such a fool as to tell her."

"Doesn't she guess?" asked Mrs. Flint, who knew well what she would learn from Dicky's face in such an issue.

"Guess? No; I don't think so—why should she? I've never suggested it by a word."

She stretched out her hand and took hold of his.

"Poor old Dicky," she whispered—the last moments of any hope she might have clung to for herself having gone in that instant of pity.

Lady Diana was out of town, wherefore Dicky gave all his time to Mrs. Flint. One night at supper, at her request, he brought Mr. Nibbs and Emily; Mr. Nibbs with hat in hand, which Dicky snatched from his fingers and thrust back to front upon his head.



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"None of that bunkum here in my studio," said he. Later, Mr. Nibbs sat down by the side of Mrs. Flint, telling her of the early beginnings of the Richard Furlong he had discovered those many years before in the Waterloo Bridge Road.

For ten days Mrs. Flint stayed in London at the house in Chelsea, then returned, full of the news of Dicky's success, to the Mill. For those ten days, in a simple pride at showing her the world in which he lived, Dicky had given up all his work to her entertainment. As soon as she had gone he returned to it again, having some one sitter or another every morning, and working late into the afternoon.

The expenses of his living at that time were such that he needed all he could make. He had no money saved and there was the cost of keeping up the Mill to be looked to. Never having learnt the value of money, he spent it recklessly. The house in Chelsea contained the indulgence of all those tastes which this new aspect of life had brought him. He paid large sums for old furniture, pleased beyond measure when one day Lady Diana said she would sooner live in his studio in Chelsea than in all the rooms in Hans Crescent or Bembridge put together.

One day in the late autumn of that year he received urgent word from Mrs. Flint that his father was ill, that he must come down to Bredon at once. He went down to the Mill without delay. Harry and Mrs. Flint met him at the station, the boy radiant at seeing that man—his father—who had told him all the country stories he still repeated to himself.



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"Is he very bad?" Dicky asked her as they drove back together, young Harry perched behind them with his bare legs dangling to the footboard.

She looked up into Dicky's face. That was all the answer that he needed. A bad cold the previous winter, which had never completely left him, had been the beginning of the long-drawn-out end. But the knowledge that his work was done, that he had failed in life and was no longer the man of energy he had been, these were like a canker at the root of all his ailing.

As soon as he saw his father, without confirmation of the doctor's opinion which he heard the next day, Dicky knew that the numbering of his days had gone upon the record. It was with an effort he brought himself to ask the poor man how he felt, and Mr. Furlong's answer—"I'm waiting, Dicky"—released him of all that painful necessity of hiding the truth.

For three days—and long and weary days—he sat at his father's bedside, telling him of his work, making Mr. Furlong's eyes light up sometimes in pride at the realisation of his son's achievement.

Then, on the third day, as he sat by the sick man's bed in the evening just before he retired himself, the miller leant forward with difficulty touching his hand.

"Dicky," said he, "beware of success like yours." It was as though it were the last clearing of his brain, like the last flaming of the candle that is almost burnt. "I don't know anything about such success

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in life. I've not been so successful myself. But the Lord loveth whom He chasteneth—not that I would say from that that He doesn't love you, my boy. But beware of a success like yours. I used to think there wasn't so much in painting pictures. To begin with, I never knew artists got the prices that they do. But I see you're in *Who's Who* now, and if you can get seven hundred pounds for one picture, there must be something in it. Therefore it must be something worth having. So don't let your success take it away."

He lay back again on the pillows, still holding Dicky's hand; then slowly the fingers loosened and Dicky silently left the room.

"He's asleep," he said to Mrs. Flint, and went out alone, walking till late that night to the spot on Bredon Hill where first he had sat and talked to Lady Diana.

The next morning Mr. Furlong was still asleep. The new day had brought him no awakening.

CHAPTER XVI

DIRECTLY after the funeral, which Mr. Leggatt attended, obsequious and insufferable in his sympathy for his bereavement, Dicky returned to London. Right through the winter he worked untiringly, promising Mrs. Flint that the next spring he would occupy his studio in the Mill for three months at least, returning to work in the heart of nature that he really loved.



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During all that time, and amongst the many portraits that he painted whilst he was in Chelsea, that only of Lord Prescott compares in masterfulness to the "Lady Diana." They were all good, all pieces of work that should have claimed, and did receive, the highest praise from the critics; but the originality of "Jade" and of the "Lady Diana" was not in them. For a couple of portraits, he had said to her that day of her first sitting, a man can paint pictures—for a couple of years he can be a great artist. He had forgotten he had said that; even the knowledge of the truth of it was scarcely conscious any longer to his mind. Now he was forcing himself to think of new schemes. It was becoming an effort to make of the people he painted, the works of art that he meant them to be.

Exaggerating this effort in the case of one lady who was sitting for him, she found him producing something that was scarcely a portrait at all.

After the fifth sitting, when she saw it nearing completion, she remarked that she had always known the back of her head was attractive, but that on canvas it was scarcely worth seven hundred and fifty pounds.

"I don't want my friends to say I'm afraid to show my face," said she.

"Wouldn't you prefer them to say you've got a picture on your walls?" he replied.

"Certainly," she said; "but I'm paying for a portrait."

He refused to change it, finally calling it "The



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Portrait——” finishing it without her. It is that picture of a lady, with back almost turned, looking at a portrait on the wall, the portrait being none other than Lady Diana in a dress of the Stuart period falling into the background in the perfect tone of distance, but her features, her expression—all unmistakably hers.

There were many to sympathise with the good lady in her refusal of it, especially since everyone recognised Lady Diana—as who could help it?

We seem to recognise the features of the ancestral portrait [said one of the papers]. Indeed, notwithstanding the accuracy of tone in its distance from the front of the canvas, it is the most attractive feature of the work.

Dicky exhibited it in the International but found that he could not ask so much for it as a picture as he would have received from the lady whose portrait it was originally intended to be. This, and many another incident of the same nature, had their effect upon his work, and when the spring came round, with its opportunity of joining Lord Freddy's party in the South of France, he accepted another portrait commission, writing to Mrs. Flint and saying, “The summer surely will see me down there again—this for certain.”

That assurance was truer than he believed himself. The summer saw him at the Mill once more.

It was in the late spring of that year, some time after they had returned from Cannes, that Dicky went down—a ten days' invitation—to Bembridge.



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To Lady Diana, his visits there were marked with a curious interest. She knew he was in love with her, and for two years had been waiting expectantly, sometimes eagerly, for that declaration which, with a man of his emotions, she knew would be passionate and unrestrained.

But the time had slipped by. The declaration had not been made. There were moments when she was even doubtful of the accuracy of her knowledge, for in psychological estimate such as these, many things in the account may be omitted.

They had never spoken of religion. He professed none. Therefore, she had no reckoning of that deep, puritanical spirit which, almost without knowing it, he had inherited from his father. She was a married woman. It was the last thing she considered that would have stood in a man's way. In her world it was no barrier; or, if it were, two years would long have overcome it.

Again, in many another man she would have taken his silence to have meant some other woman in his life. Her interest in him would have declined, ultimately fading away into mere acquaintance. But with Dicky, whose personality was a source of constant interest to her, it remained; indeed, it increased. She still waited and looked forward with some interest to his visits to Bembridge where, apart from the presence of Lord Freddy, they could be more alone.

Bembridge, indeed, was romantic enough for any love-making. It was an old Tudor mansion standing



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serenely alone above a valley in the luscious garden of Kent. Far away across the Romney Marshes on a fine day from his bedroom window, Dicky could see the faint-blue strip of the sea—a ribbon tying earth and sky in their inseparable beauty.

Here there were walks across wild gorse common, rambles by the stream that wandered through fringes of king cups in the valley below. In the garden alone you might have lost yourself. High yew hedges, planted by gardeners who in their day had uncovered their heads when Queen Anne visited Bembridge, shrubberies of lilac trees all hid gardens within gardens. Flowers grew there as they can in Kent.

Often Dicky had seen it before, but never at this time of the year. The borders were in flame with colour—all the apple trees in the orchard were spread with their glad burden of bloom. He knew what it would be like at Bredon. It was even more beautiful there.

"Bring some work if you want to," she had written in her invitation. "I shall thoroughly enjoy sitting out with you while you paint."

He had come then prepared, bringing sketching material, which he carried with him on all their walks together. At Bembridge, when there were no visitors, she wore just what pleased her best—loose country coats and that same soft shapeless hat in which he had seen her on Bredon Hill.

It was the third day of his visit, when Lord Freddy had gone up to London for the day and he was walk-



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ing with Lady Diana across the rolling common between the clumps of gorse, that Dicky whipped his satchel off his shoulders, setting his stool before him on the ground.

"Going to make a sketch?" she asked.

"Another picture of you," said he; "you and that." There was the whole of England stretching before them to that misted line of sea.

She laughed at him.

"I'm already called the Lady Hamilton to your Romney," said she. People were talking, indeed. But they had talked before. Yet she was pleased enough to pose again and stood there, with the warm wind blowing on her face, gazing across that breadth of England; seeing it, each line of it sometimes; sometimes, as he spoke in broken sentences, seeing it not at all.

"Come and sit down now," said he, when he had caught the easy symmetry of her pose. "I'll go on with the landscape till I want you again."

She sat down on the ground beside him to watch his work.

"You must give me that," she said quietly after her first silence. "It's perfectly wonderful—the pace at which you work. It seems as if I've only been standing there for five minutes and then to come back and see that. I want that sketch for my very own—you're an amazing person."

"You can have the studio picture—the thing I'm going to make of it when it's done."

He would have given her anything then. She felt



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it in his voice, warm as she had felt the wind upon her face.

"I don't want the studio picture," said she; "I want that sketch. I shall hang it in my bedroom. I sha'n't want a reminder, but there it'll be when I remember this glorious day."

"You shall have them both," he declared; "the picture'll be better than this. Oh, Lord! This is the stuff I ought to do; there's no hugging a likeness about this!"

There he seemed to realise for the first time the danger he was running in his work.

"I ought never to see London again. It's doing for me. Look at that last portrait of Mrs. Seaton Barr. She could pay eight hundred for a likeness. Do you think I didn't consider that, thinking of her shekels the whole time. I know I did my best to deceive myself about it; but then it was in my brushes—on my palette the whole time. God! How glad I was to get it done! I ought to give up that studio in Chelsea. I ought to be down in the country all the time—or else abroad."

"Why don't you give it up then?" she asked.

He worked in silence and quickly, as though he feared the thing that he might say. She knew then what was near his thoughts, almost better than he in his fear of saying it; and some reserve in her which she had held in those two years, in that swift moment seemed no longer to have purpose in her mind.

"Dicky," she said, using his christian name, not



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as endearment, yet having all that sound of tenderness upon his ears as thus it fell from her lips for the first time; "why don't you give it up?"

"I can't," said he; "that's the best and the worst of it—" and still worked on at his sketch, not daring to meet her eyes.

She sat a moment watching his face, putting out her hand at last to stop his hand from working, while with the other she took his sketch from between his knees and laid it on the ground.

"I've got to have a better answer than that," said she. "If you say it's spoiling your work—not that I can see it, look at this thing, it's going to be amazing—that on a seven-foot canvas! You can't expect every picture to be better than the last. Some are not so good. But if this painting in London is going to spoil your work you must go. There can't be any reason good enough to do that."

"There is," he muttered. He was holding upon himself now as a drowning man clings on to that first buoyant thing which is to his hand. Folly or not, he knew the moment would soon be upon him when he could not longer keep his silence. Half in dread, half in joy, his mind was waiting to meet it when it came.

The matter lay in Lady Diana's hands; all the control of it was with her. But whereas he was struggling against himself, she played with a fire she had not dreamed could burn so deep as his.

"Is it a woman?" she asked as one who has the right of confidence. Knowing that after their friend-



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ship of these years, she had that right, he felt his heart set back when he heard no jealous note or disappointment in her voice. "Would she not care at all?" he asked himself.

She repeated her question again: "Is it a woman?"

"Yes." He flung it out.

"Do I know who it is?"

"You should know," said he; "you should have guessed by now."

She looked up from her seat upon the ground and into his eyes.

"Me?"

It was said gently, quietly, with all the natural tone of a child. The soft seduction of it carried the last strength of his control away. Like a fire that has long been smouldering, he was stirred to sudden and consuming flame. He shook in his body as he sat there beside her. She had stretched out to take his hand, and found it trembling like a netted bird in her own.

"What is it—Dicky?"

"You," said he; "just you. You mean everything. I think of little else; have thought of little else ever since that day we met on Bredon Hill. There's one love in a man's life that is unlike and transcends all others—something too much above him for him ever to hope of winning it; but a love that, won or not, brings out all the best and stirs to the very deepest the most sacred emotions he has in him. I'm trying to talk sense; believe me, indeed, I am. It'll sound rot to you not being in love with me; but



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I must say it. How many times do you imagine I haven't debated the wisdom and the folly of speaking like this before? Thousands of times! A look of yours—a touch of your hand saying good-bye; the countless times we've been alone in the studio together, when it's almost seemed that you expected me to say them. But I've struggled against it, knowing that when it did come at last it would be the end of me, either in your contempt, or your pity or just your tolerant disregard. Now, to-day, this afternoon, only a few moments ago, this wonderful place having something to do with it as well, when you said my name—my christian name—I knew it was all up with me then. I knew right enough the moment had come at last. Just look up into my face."

She looked up with eyes and lips and every expression of her face obedient.

"Now," he went on passionately, "before you can speak your pity or your contempt, I love you more passionately, devotedly and faithfully than any other thing or woman in the world. Now—say what you like."

His Constance, his Dorothy, all the women who had helped to make him what he was, to make this power of passion what it had become were all gone from him then—or not gone from him, but concentrated in that one moment of his life.

So, as he looked at her, waiting for her answer, her pity or contempt, Lady Diana looked back at him. These were the words of a lover such as she



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had never heard before. He had spoken of no desire, craved no favours of her. Passion, devotion and fidelity he had said—no more, and yet how much the less all other words of love that she had ever heard seemed then to her.

She had known there was a deeper well in him than ever she had drawn, but as she sat there looking back into his eyes, the depths of it seemed fathomless, and she had stirred them to emotions such as this.

"Say what you have to say," he said again.

She swallowed in her difficulty of speech. He saw the ripple passing down her throat. And then she answered in the same quiet measure of her voice: "I love you, too."

CHAPTER XVII

IT had amazed Lady Diana that Dicky had not then taken her in his arms. She was ready, willing, passionately expectant; but in the wonder that came over him, hearing the admission she had made, he sat there merely holding her hand, dumb in astonishment at the thing he could not yet believe.

For here was the return of his mind to that first romance in life. It is seldom the woman most worthy of his passion whom the man most loves. Constance, indeed, had been worthiest of them all, of the highest of his nature; but the love that she had



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found in him, faithful and dependent, had not even the quality of his love for Dorothy or the greatness of spirit of this passion for Lady Diana.

He could not, as he sat there, bring himself to that indulgence of the lover's embrace, stolen, and fearful lest it should be seen. Embraces, endearments, all the delicious ecstasies of loving, these were to come. It was enough then that she loved him, too. The wonder of that alone was full enough amazement for his mind.

So for a while they had sat there, just with hands held, no more; no more caresses than the ceaseless passing of his fingers over hers. There was the whole of England spread before them, stretching to the line of sea; and had she not been there that were enough to fill his eyes alone. They had talked in broken sentences, all the things that lovers say; then at last, picking up his sketching materials, they had walked back together to Bembridge. Whenever, as they walked, her hand had swung by his, he had caught her fingers in his own when, turning her face to his, she had given him the look of passionate endearment that touch had asked for.

Lord Freddy was in town till late. They dined alone that night, conscious, extremely, of the silent butler waiting in the shadows of the big room; speaking of things which they alone could understand and, as they said them, keeping a steady gaze upon their plates.

It had been a day of misted heat such as spring sometimes borrows from the summer that is yet to



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come. They had dined with the windows open, the scent of a bed of wallflowers just outside offering its perfume to the air they breathed. That was all the invitation they needed to wander in the garden when the meal was done.

There the white flowers were stars the night had misted, the red tulips were all blackened and their petals closed. In an arbour of yew hedges, roofless to the sky, they sat watching the night lift up her orange lamp above a long, low bank of smoky clouds.

At last Dicky turned to her, taking both her hands, bringing round her shoulders so that her eyes were facing his.

"Diana," he said, "I don't suppose it's often in his life that a man can say he has lived to the full of all emotions, all ambition; that he has touched that moment when before and after seem like an abyss, they are so far behind him."

She smiled tenderly, almost conscious of that moment herself in her passionate content to be so wooed with words that alone made this love of theirs seem wonderful.

"Is that what you feel now?" she asked.

"Not now; but in another instant when I take you in my arms for the first time, when I kiss you as I'm going to kiss you now, then it'll be that moment, a pinnacle in my life, and no moment ever after will reach up to it."

He could sit there and contemplate it as it came; but as he spoke of it, this passionate delay was more



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than she could bear. Her eyes, her lips half parted, the very languid drooping of her head, all cried against postponement.

"Dicky," she whispered, "take me now."

So he closed his arms about her and so the greatest moment of his life when first he felt the clinging of her lips had come and gone. Then she was the thing he loved and had won. The instant when anticipation was one with that of realisation had passed. As is always with a man, his mind already was stirring to the thought of all the future that was theirs.

"Did you think to-night," he murmured as she lay there in his arms; "did you think how that dinner, with us two alone, was like a shadow cast of all the life that we shall have together?"

She lay so still, almost as one who listens that he thought she had not heard.

"Wherever it is, that's what it'll be," he went on; "you and I and the whole world still to conquer. Just like a man, I suppose, I'm thinking of all the wonderful work I can do. No more of these confounded portraits, only the things I've meant to paint all my life—the things I can do now without fear of having them lost. And you there, always you; always helping me, just as you did this morning by a few simple words of praise, claiming for your own everything I do. Oh, that's the egotism of it, I know; but I don't forget that beside all that, there's the everything I can be to you—lover, husband, father of your children, and with such tenderness



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and affection and fidelity as you've never known in your life before."

She stirred in his arms. She freed herself. She turned on the arbour seat and sat there looking at him.

"How do you mean, Dicky?" she asked slowly; "how about Freddy—what's he going to do?"

"He'd divorce you—wouldn't he?"

Of a sudden the chill of the night crept into his blood. He shivered as it passed through him.

"Divorce?" she repeated.

"Yes; wouldn't he?"

"Oh, yes; Freddy would be quite willing."

He took her hand again, searching blindly with his mind for the sudden rift in hers.

"Well?" he said.

"I don't think you understand, you dear thing," said she.

"Understand what?"

"What divorce means—the vulgarity of it; one's name in the papers, photographs in that loathsome halfpenny Press—the lies they tell about you, only hoping you'll contradict them so that you make more copy for their gluttonous columns. And then our marriage; no privacy about it; food for the Press again, making a sensual transaction of it instead of the sacrament you'd have it to be. And that's but half the picture; ostracised, you and I—both of us cut off. Who's going to care to know Mrs. Richard Furlong? There'll be another Lady Freddy Charteris soon enough. I know who he'd marry



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now, if he had the chance. And think of one's reputation in the hands of a man like him. He's said many things about us both already—and I'm his wife."

In this one sudden revelation, he beheld her point of view, the aspect of life against which he had so fiercely flung himself.

"We would go away," he said.

"Where? Where away from what I've said?"

"The Mill at Bredon. There's not a soul there. It's an old house—you could make what you liked of it. After this, I know it's ludicrous; but do you remember what you said about my furniture that day at Chelsea?"

"That's not away from it, Dicky. There's Woolas Hall and people I know, who know me all through the countryside."

"Then abroad—Italy; some of those towns below Rapallo. Who's to come across us there? The occasional visitor, but what do they matter?"

"And to be buried there, Dicky; to be buried there?"

"Why buried?" he asked; "after your life and mine these last two years, it should be resurrection. Just think of it—you and I on the shores of that wonderful Adriatic! There'd I build a place for you, Diana; we'd plan it all out—the place, the garden—God makes the gardens over there."

He struggled against odds he yet had scarcely dreamed of. The sweat was cold on his forehead; a bitter sickness was at his heart. Indeed, he was



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fighting the whole structure and the power of social influences—he with his work and his love and no weapons to his hand but these.

A greater woman than she would have acknowledged love the victor, would have yielded herself its captive and willingly accepted this imprisonment upon the shores of a far sea with that same love to keep a guard on her escape. But these social influences breed few great women such as this. Luxury, ease, and idleness, these are not sustenance for the great of heart. Constance, with her bare necessities of life in Drury Lane, bred finer blood than this.

For a while she looked at him, believing at last he meant these words he said; learning, but with a slower grasp than his, the attitude towards life against which she had cast herself.

This is the miller's son he shows me now, she thought—here his understanding fails. And yet the passion he had roused in her still burnt in the desire for its fulfilment.

"It couldn't be, Dicky," she said at last. "You don't look at it all as I can look at it. How should you be able to? You haven't had the years of this life that I have had. I couldn't cut myself adrift from it now, and with such a slur on my name as that would bring."

She put an arm about his neck.

"My dear," she said caressingly, "how should you understand?"

"Then what does it mean?" he asked, as though



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this were the voice of God in condemnation. "All this talk of love—what does it mean?"

"That I love you," she whispered. "All that it means—and the utmost it can mean."

He took her arm away and held her hands out there before him.

"You won't marry me?"

"I can't—you ought to see that; you ought to know it. We can be together—no one need know."

"Your lover!" said he.

She bent her head as though she was his and he might take her then.

But Dicky let fall her hands.

"Your husband?" he asked her.

"There's no need to worry on his account," she replied. "Freddy dare not divorce me unless I wish it."

He rose from the seat and stood before her.

"That moment," he muttered in repetition of what he had already said. "That moment when before and after seems like an abyss. God! Did I ever think it could be such an abyss as this is now!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE greatest conflict of his life lay before Dicky now. For when he is left alone to judge between his love and his desires, the flesh of a man bears hard upon his spirit.



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He might be her lover, and for how long? For their clandestine meetings, sordid in their secrecy, he must sacrifice the consciousness of honour and the freedom of his work. So it seemed easy enough to choose. But against these contentions of his conscience rose in impetuous strength all the blood of his youth, all the unanswerable importunity of his desires.

Through the long hours and till the morning broke at four, he lay awake that night, turning again and again upon his bed; now consenting, now refusing, no power in him to weigh the matter dispassionately in his mind. At the best he had contemplated her tolerant disregard, yet here she had offered him the most sacred favour a woman can grant. Then why, in the name of God, this tortured debate of mind, and to refuse the offer she had made? What other man would think an instant how to act? Why did he hesitate? His soul must shout that question for the hearing of those senses palpitating in his brain; and then he feared to answer it, for in that answer lay the decision he must make.

He rose with the daylight, leaning on his window-sill, looking out across the countryside. The summer warmth of another day was promised in the very lifting of the sun. It rose through a hazy mist of luminous grey and, flinging its light upon the reddening trunks of a clump of firs upon a distant hill. The birds had long wakened with the first glint of dawn; he saw the fluttering of them in the apple



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trees. The cry of a robin with her young rose to the note of fear as a cat stole out across the lawn. Away on a far brown stretch of farming land he saw the horses moving to their work, hugging each other in their stride as if yet half awake. It all conspired to call him forth, out of that room infested with the memories of his restless night.

With sudden resolve he dressed and went downstairs, opened a door and strode out into the garden. Then—which way? To the arbour where they had sat the night before? Or to the open common where the gorse was blazoning its brazen yellow bloom and he had heard the wonder of her saying that she loved him, too?

One moment he faltered and the next was gone, gone to the open country where no flower beds were in cut and dressed array, but where the gardener was the wind, plucking his seeds with a rushing hand and scattering them with generous disregard.

He found the same spot where they had been sitting. There were still the marks of his stool indented in the ground; there at the edge of a furze bush were the remains of a cigarette she had thrown away, the blades of grass about it were singed and brown where it had burnt itself out.

Dicky lay the full length of his body on the close, soft turf, leaving his mind to choose the passage of its thoughts, asking no immediate decision of it until the ultimate determination came.

At that hour of the morning mist hid the sea. The Romney Marshes lay asleep in veiled sunlight



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below him. Only the high land in the clearer air seemed conscious of the day it was. He lay there watching it all awaken, wondering why he had chosen that place against whose associations he might beat his spirit. Why not the yew tree arbour in the garden where he had learnt the thing he knew?

Because here he had found the best of her. From this point his judgment was clear. What had occurred afterwards, that had dismayed and confused him? Here on this spot he had set forth in his soul upon the highest path life had yet disclosed to him. What if she were a married woman? Marriage had no sacrament without love. That sacrament he was bringing her. But there in the garden at Bembridge he had learnt the slavery and dependence of her spirit upon those very conditions of life she had affected to despise. There she had offered him the thing his body was learning its hunger for, but against which the better spirit in him was crying out in revolt.

The choice of this spot, then, like that of a general pitching his camp on the night before battle, was the first uncertain step before victory. This was the strategical point from which to begin his conflict. In the garden at Bembridge the perfume she wore would have hung upon his senses, the touch of her lips would have still been warm on his. Here there were no caresses to remind him. Here there was but the memory of his work and the sound of the words of her confession that she loved him, too. These were the recollections that were as armour



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buckled upon his soul for the battle that was to be fought that early morning when the choice of life lay there before him as clearly as spread that stretch of England to the misty sea.

To be her lover, to share with her the most sacred intimacy of life, these were temptations, the urging demands of which no man could have denied. The cries of them pressing for consent were like whips across his flesh, stinging him to bodily pain. But alone and above these tortures of his mind, the clear direction of his soul remained predominant.

There on that spot, only the morning before, not a thought of desire had had its motion in him. Then she had been the very spirit of Romance, the far abiding star of his uplifting, in the light of which a man must engage the very best in him. Was it in default of that glorious exaltation he was to accept this substitute, mean in spirit, a sordid liason with another man's wife, in which discovery was to be avoided by threats of similar exposures? That was the light in which to look at it!

Only those few hours before he had climbed to the very summit of the highest moment in his life, a moment when the greatest of his work had all seemed possible after these years of its utter disregard, a moment when he knew all the meaner motive of existence, had found the meaner motives of his nature which were for his inevitable conquering. Could he then descend to this, this sensual expedient, a spiritless evasion of the mighty truth his mind, if not his body, had achieved?



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Of a sudden he leapt up to his feet, and there, with the wind blowing hard upon his face, as if to that stretch of England where it might be his conscience stood waiting and alone, he cried out, that his voice might sound the determination in his ears: "My God, no! a thousand times, no!"

CHAPTER XIX

THAT day the week-end visitors were to arrive. Dicky saw nothing of Lady Diana till lunch time; some of the morning she spent in bed, taking her breakfast there.

The first sight of her crossing the room where they had dined alone the night before roused sudden emotions in him again. She, too, had had a restless night; but with the morning's sleep had recovered enough of her freshness to seem to him as beautiful as ever. Nevertheless, there was yet that look in her eyes, bringing him the realisation of her suffering. Had she changed her mind? The touch of her hand was warm and clung on the instant in his. Had she seen the ugliness of it, too? Was he yet to win her? Hope sprang high in him. He strove against a sensation of choking in his throat.

Lord Freddy was morose at lunch, eloquent only on the boredom of entertaining week-end parties.

"What do you think of it, Furlong?" he asked. "Do you see the jest in entertaining a crowd of people you see once in a blue moon—the people who

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know enough to criticise your wines; who, if they miss their train, are downright insulted because they don't find your car to meet 'em at the station?"

"Then why do you do it?" asked Dicky.

"What else is there to do from Saturday to Monday?" was Lord Freddy's reply. He turned to Lady Diana: "You've got two or three political fellas?" said he.

"Mallinson and Sir Anthony Hopwood."

"My God," he groaned and laid down his knife and fork. "I haven't even read the paper this morning, and Hopwood'll come down with a *Westminster Gazette* under his arm, Mallinson armed with the *Spectator* and the *Saturday*, and all day long they'll be skirting round what they feel about the House o' Lords, imagining themselves extremely polite, due to me as their host and all that sort of thing, because they don't actually say it. Who else?"

"Willie Gerrish."

"Well, he's for your entertainment—not mine. What women?"

"Lady Hopwood, Mrs. Mallinson, Sylvia Stear."

"Who? Stear? Not that girl at Daly's?"

"Yes; that's the one."

"Oh, well; she's a clever little thing—wonder if she'll sing for us. She can act, too. Got a little personality of her own. How did you get to know her?"

"I just wrote and asked her to come."



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"Well, that's all right, I suppose; there wouldn't be much chance of her refusing."

Lady Diana offered him the rest of the names, to which he paid but little attention. He wished to know more of Miss Stear. Lady Diana could only inform him that she had written to the theatre with the request that it should be forwarded. The young lady in question was not acting at the time.

"Where did she reply from?" he asked.

"Somewhere in Brighton—I suppose she's taking a holiday."

He rose from lunch, asking for the paper. Later, Dicky saw him seated in a deck chair on the lawn, the frown on his face hidden behind the full breadth of the open *Times*.

"When can I see you alone?" Dicky asked Lady Diana. "I've got a lot to say to you."

"Not now, my dear," she whispered. "Perhaps this evening, after they've all come—or to-morrow morning. I'll make a time. Did you sleep badly last night?"

"Why?"

"Your eyes. They don't look like they did yesterday morning."

"I never slept at all."

"Nor I," said she; "not till the sun had been up an hour." And then a tenderness filled her eyes as she looked at him. "My dear," she murmured, "is it all done for? Is it all dead?"

"Dead?" he muttered. "Do you think things like that die!" He was about to say more, then checked



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himself. Lord Freddy had lowered his paper and was watching them from across the lawn. She questioned what it was with her eyes.

"Your husband," said he.

She laughed and went away.

To Mrs. Mallinson that evening at dinner, Dicky talked politics of which he knew nothing, yet contrived to startle and offend her and with such want of tact—so she considered it—that she turned to her next-door neighbour, and scarcely said another word to him during the meal.

Her husband was certain of a post in the next Cabinet, wherefore her sole idea of politics, as acquired from her husband's views on the matter, consisted in an inordinate desire to turn the present Government out of office at any cost, by any means.

"Now's the moment for us to drop our Tariff Reform," said she. "If we could only get a good Party cry that would touch the pocket or the sentiments of the electorate, we should sweep the country."

"Do you think it's the country that wants sweeping," he asked, "so much as the minds of the people who govern it?"

Here was unexpected opposition. She half turned in her chair to look at him.

"You're a Radical, I suppose?" said she.

"Oh, no," he replied. "I'm nothing."

"No politics!" She was too amazed.

"None."

"Dear, dear! Almost primitive. How delight-



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ful. Then you don't care whether we get in or not?"

"No," said he; "I don't—office means nothing to me. My limited view of politics permits me only to see—government, and for the good of the country. Not being a politician, I can't recognise any other politics than that. I'm behind the times. I don't read the papers."

"Don't read the papers!" Here was an astonishing young man to find at a twentieth-century dinner-table. She looked at him with pitiful regard. "Why not?"

"Because it's the Press that does it all—the Press that makes party politics to sell its papers—the Press that keeps record of the lowest events in life—murders and suicides and divorce—in order to sell its papers. In the Press men have made a Frankenstein that is devouring their most honest motives and their cleanest thoughts. That's why I don't read the papers. If I lived much longer in London, I've no doubt I should. If I lived much longer in London I should read the papers, and in a year's time I should become interested in party politics; but God, I hope, is going to preserve me from that."

"Really!" said she. "I'm sorry for your opinions. Perhaps a little reading might do you some good."

Here she had turned to her next-door neighbour, fluttering, confused, hot in her mind, quite incapable of delivering herself of anything likely to be appropriate.



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Lord Freddy sat at the head of the table, radiantly in the best of spirits, a palpable victim to the coquettish childishness of Sylvia Stear who sat on his left. She told little stories in dialect—insipid enough, but with a capable imitation of the accent that made the company about her immoderate in their laughter. She could act. That Lord Freddy had promised of her. Indeed, she acted all through dinner—mostly with her eyes. They could open in the widest innocence and glisten with the sharpest understanding.

Lord Freddy could not take his eyes away from her, and said with them, times and again, "You're a minx"; and she was quite prepared that he should call her one. He left that till later when they were alone in the garden, and all through dinner she played up to it. They questioned her about parts she had played, drawing her on to the recollection of stage stories. This was done without thinking. That end of the table was all stage talk for the rest of the meal. It flattened into politics after the ladies had gone.

At the other end of the table sat Lady Diana with Sir William Gerrish—a queen to Dicky amongst all those. Once only through the meal did her eyes meet his. Mrs. Mallinson had turned her back on him. He was alone, thankful for the rest in his mind, making little pellets with his bread, an object of pity and contempt to the butler who had heard that he was a miller's son.

In those moments he glanced at her, their eyes



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met and hope leaped up in him again. Could she prefer all this to those peaceful shores of the Adriatic? There was the instant of love as she looked at him, the next she was the hostess once more.

After the ladies had gone he found himself close to Sir Anthony Hopwood, who had pompous opinions, laudatory enough, of Dicky's portraits of Lady Diana and Lord Prescott.

"Who are you painting now?" he asked.

"No one; no more portraits."

"Dear, dear!" said Sir Anthony; "that's a pity. Don't you find it pay better than anything else?"

"Yes," said Dicky; "that's why I'm giving it up."

"A strange young man, that young Mr. Furlong," said Sir Anthony in the drawing-room to his wife. "High-principled; too high—giddy, I should call them. He'll lose his balance—that'd be a pity. He's a clever young chap."

Later that night, when the social exigencies were relaxed and people were sorting themselves out according to their inclinations, Dicky found himself alone with Lady Diana in the garden.

They walked in silence to the orchard, where the pear blossom was snow on the ground in the moonlight.

"Well," she said at last, stopping before him and turning him so that he must look at her. "Well, what does my lover say?"

She looked more radiant then than he had ever seen her, there in her black gown with simply a necklet of pearls and that moonlight which could

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not chill the warm colours of her skin—a thing to love indeed, and with all the impetuous passion of youth. But still he saw more in her than this. The victory he had made within himself that morning yet preserved in his eyes the sight of her beyond the importunity of desire; still kept her that sacred spirit of Romance in which alone the exaltation of his soul could find its vindication of the thing he sought to do. Wherefore her words—"What does my lover say?"—these fell like some dead-weighted things upon the hope renewed that had sprung up in his heart.

"Not your lover, Diana," he said firmly. "Only that amongst the thousand other things I can be. Never that alone." So he broke his mind to her, convinced her in that moment there was no yielding in him.

"Are you thinking of your work?" she asked.

"That and you—and myself."

"How of me?"

"You're made for better than any man's mistress."

He saw the shudder pass through her eyes at the sound of that word. Deep within herself she had said it more than once, yet each time had closed her ears upon it. She could find no deafness to it then.

"I can take care of myself," said she—meeting that word with pride, a hint of anger in her eyes.

"Not as I can take care of you," he replied.

"You've decided then?"

"Yes."

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She laughed—a broken sound, with pride injured, falling near to tears.

"I suppose I ought to be enraged at that refusal. What more can a woman offer? And to have it set aside! If it were any man but you, I couldn't bear to look him in the face again. Why don't I feel the insult from you?"

"That's not for me to say," said he. "Except that it is no insult. I'm only asking for more than you can give me—is it more? Yours is the refusal, not mine."

"I don't refuse." She declaimed that passionately. "Could any woman give more?"

"Not many—but you can."

"You ask too much," she exclaimed. "Haven't I shown you how much you ask!"

"I'd sooner ask too much," said he, "than take the less. What sort of creatures should we become, you and I, when a few months of this sordid secrecy had driven us to revolt? How should I work, but like some hunted beast, hungering always for you, having to lie and scheme and plot and counterplot to find even a stolen kiss from your lips?"

"Ah, it's your work!" she cried. "I knew at the base of it it was that!"

"Yes, it's my work as well as everything else. I've got to give up this portrait-painting in London. It's not a man's life. I'm trying to ape circumstances that aren't mine. I'm getting to want people to appreciate my old furniture when they come to Chelsea—not my work. I'm competing with your mil-



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lionaire who makes soap or candles and can buy the first thing his eye covets. Those aren't my circumstances. I'm a miller's son, and I've got more brains than all these soap and candle-makers put together. But I haven't got their money. Yes; it is my work I'm considering, because that's me, everything to do with me, and to do with you, if there's ever to be anything between us. You say you love me—then you love a miller's son—a man who's got work to do, that by God is worth doing to the best of it, if it's to be done at all."

It was outbursts such as these that nearly carried her with him. But then his voice fell to tenderness. He took her hand, lifted it to his lips.

"My dear," he murmured, "these are no moments to juggle with words. There's only one way for us to come together. There's no half-measure in the sort of love I have for you. You must become one with me or you must remain as you are, and I must go my own way as well as I can."

She had those words still tingling in her ears—"then you love a miller's son"—and the wrench of it was too great. There in all its vividness was a picture to her mind of her hands folded in her lap as she sat idle by the shore of the Adriatic while he worked. And in that idleness she could see herself thinking of all the things they were saying in England. She could not cast her mind far enough to realise that there she would not care what they said. They were about her then—even that little coquette who had danced her eyes at Lord Freddy all the



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evening—they were all about her, and she did care.

"Which is it to be?" Dicky asked her.

She bent her head. That was her answer. He knew he must go.

"Then good-bye, my dear," said he. "Lift up your face. I want a kiss to carry with me."

She expected the full flame of his passion then, but he kissed as if her lips were marble, and she knew his soul was greater than hers. Then she started in his arms.

"Dicky!"

"What?"

"Who was that? Someone's seen us. There! He'll pass that opening in the yew hedge in one second now."

They waited and watched, and presently there passed by Sir Anthony with his head erect, displeasure plain in every step he took.

CHAPTER XX

THEY went back in silence to the house. In the large hall, at the foot of the staircase, Dicky gave her her lighted candle.

"Good-night," he said. "Don't blame me; I don't blame you. And if you ever get tired of it, you'll know where to find me." A wry smile twisted his lips. "I believe I've achieved the recognition of *Who's Who* now. I think that was the one thing that made my father so proud of me before he died."



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She tried to smile with him. She was on the verge of yielding all in that instant; the verge whose balance was at the same time fixed within her mind.

"God bless you," he went on. "Sleep well to-night. It's all settled. There's nothing to worry you now. I shall find some excuse and be gone to-morrow."

She tried to bless him, too, but the words broke in her throat, at which she turned upstairs with the tears pitching down her cheeks. He watched her out of sight, then made his way to the smoking-room. There he had closed the door behind him before he realised that Sir Anthony alone was in the room. To retire again was a confession of guilt. He took out a cigarette and went over to the mantelpiece for the matches.

Sir Anthony looked up from the *Saturday Review*, coughing portentously.

"It's a glorious night," said Dicky.

"Exceptionally beautiful," said Sir Anthony, "for this time of year." He had seemed to add the latter part of his sentence as if it were an afterthought; as if, indeed, he had intended to say something else. Dicky was aware of that and wondered how, with any semblance of conviction, he could leave the room. He looked at the clock. It was past eleven. There was always the excuse of going to bed. He made for the array of candles that stood on a cabinet at the other side of the room.

From behind his *Saturday Review*, Sir Anthony saw his intention and coughed again.

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"Ah, going to bed?" he said.

"It's after eleven," said Dicky.

"Dear me, so it is; well—just a moment. There's—there's something I want to say to you—no business of mine, of course; but I can give you a year or two in a matter of experience—just a year or two, eh?"

"I don't want to seem too ready to admit it," said Dicky with a smile.

"No, no; but it admits itself."

"What is it?" asked Dicky.

"A piece of advice, my boy."

He laid down his paper on his knees.

"Yes."

"Don't—er—don't make love to married women. It's—it's nothing to do with me, of course; but—but don't."

"I wasn't," said Dicky quickly.

"You weren't? Oh, well, of course it's nothing to do with me."

"You saw me kissing Lady Diana," said Dicky boldly.

"I did," said Sir Anthony; "and if that isn't making love, then—then I'm an older man than I thought I was."

"Well, I wasn't making love," repeated Dicky emphatically. "I'm in love with Lady Diana—and—and—of course I'm going away. I'm going away to-morrow. I'm—I'm not going to see Lady Diana again."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Sir Anthony.

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"Going back to your work again, well—that's the very best thing you could do. You're clever enough at your job." Sir Anthony intended to convey that Dicky's job was not politics. "It's the very best thing you could do."

"And I hope, Sir Anthony," said Dicky, "that you'll say nothing of what you saw this evening. Take it as meaning nothing. I—I was saying good-bye to her. You'll find me gone to-morrow."

"Oh, you can trust me, my dear boy; you can trust me—it's no business of mine. I shall say nothing unless I'm asked. One can't absolutely forget what one's seen, you know; but I have no desire to be mixed up in these matters. I shall say nothing, unless I'm asked."

Dicky lit his candle. "You won't be asked," said he.

"Indeed, I hope not," said Sir Anthony. "Good-night—you're going off to bed—a wise move; I shall turn in myself in a minute or two. But remember what I've said—you're clever enough at your own job—get back to it. Good-night—er—good-night."

On the stairs Dicky passed the butler making his rounds. The man bid him good-night, and Dicky, thinking of his departure the next morning, felt hurriedly in his pocket.

"I'm off to-morrow morning," said he. "I have to get back to town."

"On Sunday, sir?"

"Yes."

The butler took his tip far more casually, far more



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naturally than if Dicky had offered to shake hands with him.

"Thank you, sir," said he.

"Will you tell the footman then—I forget his name—to pack up for me directly after breakfast."

"Yes, sir. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night."

Dicky went on up the stairs, while the butler descended looking sideways into the palm of his hand.

The clocks through the house were striking twelve as Dicky got into bed, knowing that sleep was as far from him as it had been the night before. He took up a book from his bed-side table and tried to read, wondering if the man had suffered and felt what he wrote as he was suffering then; wondering how it would affect his own work, whether it really were worth doing as he had so bravely said to her.

Courage was scarcely predominant in him then. Those hours of the night were not for energy of will. He knew that sleep was the only thing to bring that courage back again; yet his eyes were open wide. He laid down the book and stared before him with nerves rubbing raw edges against every thought that circled in his brain.

A smile without laughter in it crossed his eyes. In such a state of mind as this he could understand a man drinking himself to sleep. Anything were better than this wakeful nightmare when life, in that overpowering stillness, seemed possessed of devils delighting in his despair.

Unable to bear it any longer, he jumped out of



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bed, feeling in the pocket of his coat for his cigarettes. The case was not there. Was he to be deprived even of that relief? Where had he left them? He dragged his wits together, recalling what he had done that night, where he had smoked. Once after dinner in the dining-room. But he had not left them there, because he had smoked again later, on the terrace. Once again then in the orchard, as he and Lady Diana had walked up and down. Where after that? He must have put them back in his pocket. It was almost a relief to his trembling nerves to have to think out these actual movements. The smoking-room! The first thing he had done when he had found Sir Anthony alone in occupation.

Without any further deliberation, he slipped on his dressing-gown and opened the door. The whole house was still. Not a sound could he hear. As he walked down the stairs a clock in the gallery of the hall struck one.

At the foot of the stairs he stopped. There he had handed Lady Diana her candle; there he had said good-night to her for the last time.

"What a fool a man can be," he muttered, and strode on silently down the passages to the smoking-room in a far wing by itself. Yet enough determination was there in him to be glad of his folly. Had she appeared to him then, he felt he would still say what he had already said.

At the door of the smoking-room he stopped, holding his candle there uncertainly in his hand. There was a light within. He leant his head close against

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the door for the sound of voices—politics, he guessed—but everything was silent.

Determination to get what he had come for persuaded him that there was no one there.

"Someone's left the lights on," he muttered to himself, then opened the door gently and went in.

But the room was not empty. There, stretched out in the ungainly attitude of exhaustion, in a big armchair, was Lord Freddy—fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

DICKY'S first instinct was to retire, to leave him there; yet he had come so far, why not the last few steps? There was his cigarette case on the mantelpiece. Holding his breath, he crept on tip-toe to where it was, and in the act of taking up the case Lord Freddy stirred. Dicky looked quickly over his shoulder when, with a clattering, metallic sound, the cigarette case fell into the grate below.

Lord Freddy opened his eyes. Without altering his attitude, he sat there staring at Dicky in some bewilderment.

"What's up?" he asked, and in that first instant Dicky knew that he was drunk.

"I left my cigarettes down here. I came to fetch 'em. Wanted a smoke before I went to sleep.

"What's'e time?"

"Just after one o'clock."



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"Have a drink."

Lord Freddy found an unfinished glass of whisky at his side and put it at once to his lips.

"No, thanks," said Dicky.

That drink revived Lord Freddy. With a little difficulty he struggled to a more wakeful position in his chair.

"Have a drink," he repeated.

Dicky refused again, than which it seems there is no more offensive attitude possible to a man who is already drunk himself.

Lord Freddy rose with difficulty to his feet. Crossing the room unsteadily he refilled his glass.

"You're a sociable beggar, aren't you?" he exclaimed suddenly.

Dicky smiled quietly. He lit a cigarette.

"Hardly the hour of night to expect sociability, is it?" he suggested.

Lord Freddy came back to his chair.

"Damned if there's any hour I can find you sociable," he muttered. "You come down here and you stay with us for a week or more and you talk to my wife, but I'm damned if you've got a word to say to me. Aren't I good enough for you? Is that what it is? Not clever enough, I suppose. You're so damned clever, aren't you?"

This was deliberate enough, yet not even an excess of drink could make Lord Freddy's rudeness impolite. He spoke quite quietly and in excellent manner. He was still the grandson of the fifth earl, however deeply in his cups.



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But to Dicky, who had little experience of men in this condition, whose pride was a thing never easily roused, and whose nerves already were strung to snapping pitch, these remarks of Lord Freddy's, however gently they may have been made, stung him to confusion. He did not know how to reply. There he stood with the blood burning a crimson in his cheeks.

"I'm sorry if I've—seemed like that," he said awkwardly, uncomfortably conscious a little perhaps that this was his host, eager to mollify him if he could. But to the man who becomes a bully in his cups, these methods are ineffective. Lord Freddy felt himself the master of the situation. He drank again from his glass, and if he had had any doubt about it a few moments ago, now again felt master of himself. To the vision of his mind in that state it seemed that Dicky was one of those damned, conceited clever young bounders—one of Diana's cubs—to whom a few straight words would do a deal of good.

"Well, you've seemed like that to me," he continued aggressively. "A damn sight too big for your boots. You can paint a bit—a good bit, they say." As he said this he felt it was a generous admission. "But after all you're only the son of a miller, aren't you?—a chap who calls my steward sir."

His voice rose to a higher pitch at this. Indeed, he was compelled to raise it to convince some instinct within himself, doubting that it was a proper thing to say.



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The words then and the tone of voice fell on Dicky's ears, but the sensation was that of water flung in his face. The blood went from his cheeks and left them white. With almost superhuman control, which only that situation could have expected of him, he turned without a word towards the door. Another moment and he would have been gone. Circumstance might, indeed, have saved him; but circumstance failed. Lord Freddy's eyes had chanced to fall upon the clock. It was nearly half-past one.

"And what are you doing, wandering about the house at this time of night?" he asked.

There had struck suddenly upon his conscience the things that had passed between himself and the little actress that evening. But for her refusals, he, too, might have been up and about at such an hour. He still entertained hopes of her leniency. Then what was this fellow doing, and in his house? With a sudden involuntary action of his mind, he recalled the look he had seen passing between Dicky and Diana only that morning on the lawn. There were, too, all the things that people had said, every one of which had come to his ears. Lady Hamilton to his Romney! His Romney be damned! He had put up with enough from Diana. This was carrying it a bit too far.

"What are you doing?" he repeated.

"I told you," said Dicky firmly, as yet not understanding what he inferred. "I came down to get my cigarettes."

Lord Freddy laughed.

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"Do you keep awake till this hour of the night to get your cigarettes?" he demanded.

A suspicion leapt into Dicky's mind at this. His hand had been upon the handle of the door. He had even opened it. Now he shut it quietly and came back into the room.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"What do I mean? What should you think I mean?"

Scarcely conscious of why he did it, with a dim notion in him perhaps that he needed a steady mind to meet what was to come, Dicky walked to the table where the glasses and syphons stood and took the stopper out of the cut-glass decanter.

"I've no conception," said he.

The quietness of his voice in such a moment was an irritation in itself to Lord Freddy. He crossed the room unsteadily to Dicky's side.

"I mean that your cigarettes can be damned for a tale—that's what I mean. Cigarettes at half-past one at night when everybody else in the house is asleep except the one who's expecting you!"

Dicky's fingers closed, fiercely gripping the decanter in his hand.

"Hadn't you better go up to bed," he said; "you're—you're drunk."

"Drunk, am I? Well, if I am I'm sober enough to know what you're up to." So far had he let the suspicion take hold upon him, there was no rooting it from his mind now. Half-smitten with the guilt of his own conscience, half urging the thought of his



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honour upon his muddled senses, he was determined now to have the matter out. They were alone. In that part of the house there was no one to hear them. And if there were, what the devil did it matter? By now he had convinced himself that he had caught Dicky red-handed, and there was enough spirit in him to let him know. His grandfather would have whipped him out of the house, and what his grandfather would have done was potential in him, too. The good old days were not gone yet. They might call the House of Lords effete but, by God! he was not one of them for that!

"Drunk or not!" he shouted, "do you think I'm going to stand here complacent while you make your way up to her bedroom?"

"Whose bedroom?"

Dicky's eyes were in flame.

"Whose? Diana's, of course! My wife's! Do you think I don't know, and everybody else, too, the game you've been up to this last year and more—painting her portrait and all that damned rot; there alone in your studio for hours together, and can't even have the decency to drop it when you come to my house!"

For a moment words were tied on Dicky's tongue. He stood there with open mouth, still holding on to his decanter, numbed for the instant in his amazement.

"Well, I see you've got nothing to say to that!" cried Lord Freddy.

"Haven't I?" said Dicky below his breath.



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"Well, I'm a miller's son, as you reminded me, and by your rights I should be calling you sir; but by my own, and in the language of a miller's son, I call you a filthy and contemptible little cad. If you weren't what you are, if you were not her husband, if this were not her house, I'd get a whip and thrash you till you couldn't stand. You—abominable little cad!"

These were words with a vengeance; such that Lord Freddy could not ignore. There was only one answer to them—the answer that his grandfather would have given seventy years ago. All the spirit of that fine old gentleman he felt ought to be in his heart by then, and relying that it was, he flung out his fist to Dicky's face.

Dicky raised the hand holding the decanter, but too late. With no great power behind it the blow had landed, and following up his advantage—thinking, no doubt, the matter were easier than it was—Lord Freddy shot out right and left again.

Both found a mark, one on the side of his head, the other cutting his lip. There was a sting of pain with this last, and then the blood was up and full in Dicky's eyes. He looked the murderer that he felt. It was the return of that moment when he had fought the man upon the bridge over the Serpentine. Scarcely realising that it was in his hand, he lifted the decanter above his head. Lord Freddy saw the blow descending. With a quick cry, seeing then in sudden illumination the instant of death in it, he ducked his head. The jagged thing fell with a sullen thud be-



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hind his ear. With a moan he rolled to the ground.

Dicky wiped his arm across his forehead and put the decanter down.

"Now you'd better get up and go to bed," said he. "Have I hurt you much?"

There was no answer.

He's knocked unconscious, thought Dicky, uncomfortably realising how helplessly he had lunged to the floor. He knelt down by his side.

"Lord Freddy," he said.

There was no movement in the body. He turned him over. There was the deep wound behind the ear, bleeding steadily. With a sickness rising in his throat, Dicky seized his wrist. There was no sensation of a pulse. "I'm excited," he said to himself. "I can't feel it." He tore open Lord Freddy's shirt and laid his ear against his heart. There was no sound. He stood up looking about him. On the writing-table was a magnifying glass; he ran to the desk and snatched it up, bringing it back and holding it against Lord Freddy's lips. It shook against his teeth, but there was no sign of breath upon it.

"He's dead," he muttered, and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he pulled a handkerchief out of the pocket of his dressing-gown and began mopping the blood behind his ear. But what was the good of that? He was dead. He must wake the house. He rose to his feet, walking unsteadily to the bell and rang it. Then he came back to the



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body on the floor and with an effort steadied himself.

"Now," he muttered, "pull yourself together—listen carefully, they'll all be here in a minute."

So he knelt down again by Lord Freddy's side, laying his ear once more upon his heart. It was quite still. This was death. There was nothing to do but wait until they came. He had killed him, but it was in self-defence. They would understand that. He could tell them how it happened. How had it happened? They had quarrelled. About what? About Lady Diana. Lord Freddy had accused him—there his mind stopped. She must not be brought into it. And yet why not? It was not the truth. She could swear that. Again his mind stopped, like a heart that for the instant ceases its beating. Would Sir Anthony swear it? To him, Dicky had admitted he was in love. He had promised to say nothing of it—unless he were asked. This—this was such a moment when he would feel compelled to speak.

God! What could he tell them when they came? He ran to the door and listened. The whole house was still. He waited there with breath hanging on his lips for ten minutes and more. It seemed like an eternal hour. Not a soul was awake. He shut the door and a great breath of relief broke from him. There was time to think.

She must be protected. At all costs she must be saved. If Sir Anthony told his story they might even suspect her of complicity. That very thing which she dreaded—the awful exposure in the Press



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—that would be upon her more heavily thus than in any other case.

What could he say then? Nothing! For if he spoke Sir Anthony would inevitably speak as well.

In a sudden motion of his mind he went to the door again and opened it. Still the house was deep in its silence. Then who was to know? No one. Lord Freddy had been the only one who had known that he had come downstairs. Sir Anthony had seen him go to bed—the butler had seen him go to bed. Who was to know? That was the way out of it to save her. He thought no other issue beyond.

He looked round the room. Nothing that he could see could prove he had been there. Firm now in his decision, he crept out of the door and closed it behind him—leaving the lights as they were. Then once alone in his room again he knew he was safe. There was only one suggestion that had not occurred to him. He had not supposed the minds of others when in the morning they found Lord Freddy there. That one question, “Who *has* done it?”—that in all its simplicity had never entered his thoughts.

CHAPTER XXII

A MAID discovered Lord Freddy's body the next morning. It was no uncommon thing for lights left burning all night in that room. This did not surprise her; but when she stumbled upon the huddled mass lying there in its ugly pool of



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blood, she ran shrieking, one cry after another, to the kitchen.

With a following of curious domestics at his heels, the butler led the way back to the smoking-room. The women hung in the doorway, the men accompanied him into the room. He was prepared for the horror of the sight that met his eyes. The maid had properly exaggerated it. The room full of blood, she had cried between hysterical sobbings, which no doubt it had seemed to be to her.

Hills, therefore, was ready to command the situation with coolness and authority, yet even he exclaimed the name of God as he saw his master lying there.

"He's killed himself," he announced to them all; and then, the alternative seeming quite as likely, he added, "or somebody's killed him."

The matter was that he was dead. The body was chilled and stiff.

"Let one of you go," said Hills, "and tell her ladyship that his lordship's dead here in the smoking-room. Who'll go?"

He certainly was not the one wishing to break it to her. They were all in accord with him there. Not a voice amongst them volunteered.

"Come on," said Hills, "come on; who'll go? Somebody must." He singled out one of the kitchen maids who had recently caused him some annoyance. "Tillett," he said, "you go."

The wretched girl began to whimper.

"Couldn't I say there was somethin' the matter



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with 'im?" she whined. "Need I 'ave to say 'e's dead?"

Lady Diana's maid stepped into this breach and took it upon herself to go. Hills stood there, wiping the perspiration off his forehead. He had known that the duty was his—not that he was accustomed to finding himself in such a situation—but he was very glad to be rid of it.

"You'd better all go," he said to the rest of them. "It's an ugly business, whatever it is. Her ladyship won't want the crowd of you standing round gaping at her. Off you go!"

They stole away back into the passages, a whispering crowd, not actually sorry for the master they had just seen dead; in fact, in those moments, once the shock of it was over, finding life somewhat interesting. For what would her ladyship do?—that was what they were all asking each other. One, bolder and more curious than the rest, crouched by the folding doors into the kitchen quarters and watched Lady Diana in her dressing-gown go swiftly by.

There in the smoking-room alone, Hills was waiting for her. He stood near the door when she entered saying, "Good-morning, my lady"; having, indeed, decided that that was the only thing he could say.

"Where is he, Hills?" she asked in a whisper.

"Over there, my lady; on the floor. I've covered the face, but I haven't touched anything. That's what you have to do—don't touch nothin'."

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She crossed the room and stood at a distance with her long hands nervously holding her cheeks.

"What's to be done?" she said below her breath.
"Are you sure he's—he's dead?"

"Afraid so, my lady. According to me, he's been dead some hours."

"Oh, Hills; how terrible!"

"Terrible; that's what it is, my lady."

He thought she might mean the loss of her husband; but she was speaking of death alone; of death which was as sudden and unexpected as that.

"I can't do anything," she muttered. "I don't know what to do." She felt the shock of it breaking down her nerves. With an effort she pulled herself together.

"Go and call Sir William Gerrish," she said.
"Tell him I want him here at once. Just explain what's happened. Go now, Hills—I'll wait here."

For some moments she stood where he had left her, staring at that silent thing upon the floor. Pity she felt, but could not feel it for him. It was pity for life that was wasted. There was no softness in her heart as she looked at him, and no thankfulness. All she knew was that it was hypocrisy to be sorry, and a hateful and horrible thing to be glad of her release. So her mind was in confusion, conscious only that death like that was terrible.

At last, as if hypnotised, drawn by the thing she had been looking at so long, she moved like one in a trance to the side of the body. As yet it had not entered her consideration to think that she was free



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—free now to marry Dicky. But as she pulled aside the cloth with which Hills had covered the face, the thought leapt into her mind with all the fulness of its comprehension.

With the realisation of that she let the cloth fall back again, ashamed to look. There she knelt then with her face buried in her hands. She was free. That overwhelmed her. She struggled in her heart not to be glad.

Presently she took her hands away, now with a greater composure in her mind. How had it happened? Only then did that aspect of it approach her. How had it happened? Freddy was not the man to kill himself. Such excesses of emotion had never shown themselves in him. He had been murdered. There were horrible details to be elucidated. She shuddered at the sudden thought that she would have to give evidence. The loathsome publicity of those ghastly newspapers, making their living out of her tragedy, sickened her mind.

Touch nothing, Hills had said. What was there to touch? There he lay, and what could they discover from that? With an almost morbid curiosity she tried to see how he had been killed. There, behind the head—and as she looked, the sight of a white thing caught her eye. It was under his shoulder, drenched with blood.

Forgetting in that moment what Hills had said, nervous and overwrought in her state of morbid curiosity, she dragged it out from below the body. It was his handkerchief. How had it come there?



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But as she lifted it up, initials in the corner which her fingers held started to her eye. R. F., she read; R. F.! One of the handkerchiefs she had once given Dicky. What did that mean? How could she tell what it meant? But the instinct of preservation now of a sudden roused in her, brought her realisation of what it would mean to those who found it.

Without giving herself time to reason it, acting alone upon the inspiration of the moment, she carried the bloody thing to where a newspaper was lying on the floor. Keeping the blood from off her fingers, she laid it on a sheet of the paper and swiftly wrapped it up. Here was her instinct acting with marvellous accuracy. For once that sheet enfolded it, then another, and another still. There was no fear of the blood staining her now. She thrust it inside the loose folds of her dressing-gown, and only then wondered what was the full meaning of what she had done.

She had saved Dicky—but from what? From horrible suspicion, or from justice? Which?

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE breakfast the whole house knew of it. Dicky lay in his bed, waiting for the footman to knock on his door; waiting for the one moment which his mind, dazed though it was, yet had the consciousness of dread—that moment when he should be told of the thing that had happened in the night.



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Once that was passed he had no other fear of consequences than that Sir Anthony would still consider it his duty to speak. This was unlikely, but there the possibility of it was. Beyond these two events, no fear, not even uneasiness, assailed him. The conviction that he had saved Diana from terrible consequences, the otherwise numbed and inert condition of his mind, contributed to an even pulse and a calmness of manner which at moments amazed even himself. Indeed, it was not until two days later that he realised how his condition must have been almost that of hypnosis, so quiet and self-possessed he was.

For even when the half-dreaded moment did come, it was as though he looked on at himself, with all his emotions quiescent, playing a part, because it was the part he ought to play. An easy conscience doubtless saved him much. The blow he had struck had been justified. He had been insulted; he had been attacked; it was in self-defence. There had been the intention of punishment in it alone. He had scarcely known—if known at all in that blind moment—that the decanter was in his hand. No qualm of conscience could be there. If such occasion arose, he knew he would do the same again, when the direction of the blow, falling elsewhere than it did, an ugly wound would have been the result—no more.

Accordingly, when the expected knock fell at last upon the door, he heard his voice replying with a quiet and even precision. The footman entered the room.

Dicky's eyes were quickly to his face as he set

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down the tray of tea things by the side of the bed. That instant told him. They all knew of it; but it was with the utmost calmness that he waited to hear it from the man's own lips.

"There's been a terrible thing 'appen in the night, sir," he said as he crossed the room to arrange Dicky's clothes.

"What's that?" asked Dicky

"'Is lordship, sir."

"What about him?"

"'E's dead, sir."

"Dead?"

"'E's killed 'imself or been murdered, sir—they don't know which."

Dicky lay a moment in silence. He was not conscious of acting, yet this was far more effective than any exclamation of surprise.

"Have they told Lady Diana?" he asked presently.

"Yes, sir; the maid who found it out; she came running into the kitchen, then Hills and all of us we went into the smoking-room, and there he was—lying in his own blood as you might say, sir." Indeed, it would have been difficult to say anything else. "Then Hills, he sent for her ladyship and she came down in her dressing-gown and sent for Sir William Gerrish."

"Why for him?" asked Dicky.

"I don't know, sir, unless being an old friend."

So there was the whole account of it, and, for a domestic, briefly delivered.

"Hills said you wanted me to pack for you, sir."



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"Yes; I said so as I was coming to bed last night; but, of course, I can't go now."

"Well, sir, I don't know; I expect her ladyship won't be able to do much entertaining—not to say entertain."

The strange nature of Dicky's composure was such that he could smile at this.

"I don't mean that," said he. "They've sent for the police, of course."

"So I 'eard, sir. For a detective, I believe."

"Well, no doubt he'll want everyone in the house to stay—for a time, at least. You'd better not pack just yet, anyhow."

"Very well, sir."

There was the interview he had dreaded, finished and done with. To no one else would he have to force that assumption of surprise. One and all, by footman and maid, they would be told as he had been. When, then, he met Sir Anthony in the corridor, his expression more portentous, his face longer than usual, Dicky was able to approach the matter himself. Here was the only man in whom his fate lay somewhat in the balance. He was determined not to refer to their conversation of last night himself. That was for Sir Anthony to speak of; but he did not shirk the matter uppermost in all their minds.

"This is a terrible thing," he said quietly; "the suddenness of it is so impossible to realise."

Sir Anthony stopped, turning his eyes sharply upon Dicky's face. Had he been told that he was to pass through the ordeal of those moments of scrutiny

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and without flinching, Dicky would not have credited it as possible. His nerves alone, he would have declared, would have given him away. But such was the benumbed condition of his mind that he met Sir Anthony's gaze quietly and unswervingly.

Had there been an instant's embarrassment, Sir Anthony, precise, orthodox, and equitable in all his thoughts and deeds, would have acted otherwise. The straight look in Dicky's eyes almost convinced him. He took him by the arm.

"Just come into the drawing-room for a minute or two," said he. "There'll be nobody there."

The room was empty. When Dicky had followed, Sir Anthony closed the door.

"Ever since I heard of this terrible and distressful business," he began, "I've been at my wits end—I—I don't mind admitting it. What—what was the proper thing for me to do."

"Why?" said Dicky quietly. "What do you mean?"

"Mean," exclaimed Sir Anthony. "Do you mean to say the seriousness of your position has not made itself apparent to you?"

"My position? How is my position serious?"

Again it was as though he were far away, listening still to the composure of his voice, approving it, knowing that for Diana's sake he was doing what was right—what only could be done in justice to her.

Sir Anthony looked at him in some astonishment. "Don't you see," he went on, "that if I were to



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speaking of what I saw last night, suspicion would fall heavily upon you? Now it's not for me to judge, of course, convinced as I—as I—may be that you didn't do it. However, it's for me to choose, and not upon the foundation of my judgment. As I say, I may not judge—that is not my capacity. What must I do then? This I've been asking myself over and over again as I was in my bath, while I shaved, while I brushed my hair and dressed. Am I, by what I say, to cast the suspicion upon you, or am I to keep silent? Which is the fairer course, the just decision? I assure you, I almost feel years older since I was first informed of this calamity this morning."

"Which," said Dicky slowly, "are you going to do?"

It was in this moment, the first of that day's experience, that he felt the instant's quicker beating of his heart.

"I have two people to consider," said Sir Anthony—"Lady Diana and yourself. Already I have considered her. I have great respect for her, Mr. Furlong. Notwithstanding what you told me last night, I have a great respect for her. She is one woman in a thousand. And in these matters, where, moreover, honour and reputation are concerned, women must be judged with gentleness, consistent with a just attitude of mind."

He paused, while Dicky waited, knowing that eagerness were fatal then. He would not ask again. The old gentleman, for all the years that had been added to his life whilst he had had his bath and

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brushed his hair, was not a little pleased and impressed with these well-balanced motions of his mind. Presently he went on again.

"I decided," said he, "in Lady Diana's favour. I decided that if she were the only one to be considered, then, I should say nothing. But there was you."

He beetled his brows and his eyes shot inquiringly to Dicky's eyes. Again Dicky met them, wondering how many more times the ordeal would repeat itself, wondering how many more times this composed and acting-self of his would be able to meet it with calmness and equanimity.

"You went to bed last night," resumed Sir Anthony suddenly. "I saw you light your candle and go."

"Yes."

"Did anyone else see you go?"

"The butler—I passed him on the stairs. I spoke to him. I told him I should be going this morning—of course, I can't go now. I suppose they'll want to detain all of us—till to-morrow at least."

"Yes, I expect they will. Well, then, there is another witness to the fact that you went to bed—I'm glad of that; I'm glad of that. That relieves my mind still more. And please, my dear boy, don't suppose that a single suspicion of you has ever crossed my mind. It has only been with me what was the just thing to do."

"I understand that," said Dicky, and the desire to



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ask him then what his intentions were became almost importunate and irresistible. Still he kept his silence.

"Well, now I've decided," Sir Anthony continued. "You're at the beginning of your career, and if I don't make any mistake, it's a big career that you've got in front of you. I've decided it would be a cruel thing to so hamper that career at its very commencement by a dangerous suspicion such as this. My dear boy—I believe I'm right—I'm—I'm going to say nothing about what I saw and what you so honestly confessed to me last night."

He thrust out his hand, and not relief alone, but admiration for the old man's quality of mind, made Dicky seize it warmly in his.

"Now come into breakfast," said Sir Anthony, "if any of us can eat it—which I doubt. I know I want nothing—just a little porridge, an egg, and some fruit—that's all I shall take."

It was Dicky who ate nothing. Sir Anthony fed well.

At mid-day the detective came. Lady Diana was seen by no one. She stayed all those hours in her bedroom, and only Sir William Gerrish had conversation with her. There was no surprise to Dicky that she did not send for him. After his interview with Sir Anthony, he realised well enough the folly of their being seen together. But he could not guess the more certain reason of her silence.

As soon as she was alone in her room, taking all precautions to leave no trace of what she had done,

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she burnt the handkerchief she had found, depositing the ashes up the chimney in her room lest they might call her to account for them.

The detective was a sardonic-natured man, even in plain clothes, bringing, with his assistant, an air of the law into the silent house. One by one he questioned every guest who was staying there. Malinson and Sir William, perhaps, most closely of all. They were the last to see Lord Freddy alive in the smoking-room. Together they had left him there—a little, they admitted, the worse for drink.

During her examination, Sylvia Stear was reduced to hysterics; a slight attack, due no doubt to the remembrance of their flirtation just a few hours before, and an emotional inability to reconcile it with the tragedy that had taken place.

"I was walking with Lord Freddy in the garden at half-past ten," she said, and then began to whimper into tears. The detective had nodded to his assistant, indicating the door. He had been told that she was on the stage and in what capacity.

"You didn't see him after he left you in the hall to go to bed?"

"No."

"Had he had much to drink when he was with you?"

Her answer was so incoherent that the detective came to the conclusion he was wasting time. Everybody was questioned. Dicky's examination lasted but a few moments. He bore himself with the same impassive composure.



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Ultimately they were all called into the drawing-room, where Sir William addressed them; unable, it seemed, to prevent himself from making it the occasion for a little speech. This was from no pompous intention. He found himself on his feet, commanding the room. So he had stood at hunt suppers, and he found it difficult to disassociate the sensation from his mind.

"The detective says," he concluded, "that he does not wish to keep—to—that is—detain anyone—any longer. Everyone is now free to go. If I—if I might suggest it, for Lady Diana's sake, I would propose, if it's agreeable to everyone, that we go before dinner. The servants are overwrought—that is, they're upset, and, as I said, I think the best thing we can do——"

"I'm quite prepared to go this evening—before dinner," said Sir Anthony.

They were all in agreement.

Dicky was in the first consignment to leave. Up till the last moment he considered the possibility of receiving a message from Diana. None came. He turned back in the car as it span out of the drive to the station. There rose the top of the yew arbour above the hedges, and his thought was of her there, two nights before in his arms. All that had passed since then seemed like a distant dream from which he did not awaken until he was back in his own studio once more.



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CHAPTER XXIV

THE papers had enough to talk about for a week. Who had murdered Lord Freddy Charteris? Absence of any clue drove the police to the opinion that it had been someone in the house; whereupon one enterprising illustrated half-penny paper produced photographs of all those comprising the week-end party, offering no suggestion, but cunningly leaving the public—students of physiognomy as they all are—to judge for itself. Mr. Mallinson would have been surprised on the morning of that issue to have known by how many his features were selected as those of the likely person.

“Look at this!” he declared to his wife, holding up the paper that she might see, but taking good care not to let it out of his hands. After which he looked intently at his own portrait, rather a flattering one, remarking that anyone could see he was innocent.

To Dicky those glaring placards noising it about town became unbearable. They shouted it at him wherever he went. Lady Diana’s name was bandied from one newspaper board to another. He could endure it no longer. His nerves at last gave way. The sight of another placard, the sound of another voice shouting the latest news, would have snapped the last thread of his control. He shut up the studio in Chelsea, cancelled all engagements, and rushed out of town to the country. There only was peace for him—at the Mill. There only could he pursue the

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work that lay before him, the work for which he had sacrificed the love of Lady Diana, the work that was to save him from that narrow groove into which he had so nearly fallen in the last two years.

The sight of welcome in Mrs. Flint's eyes rested his trembling nerves. The first cry of young Harry for more stories distracted his mind from the subject which was fast becoming an obsession. That night, for the first time since his struggle with himself against the desire of Lady Diana, he slept almost in peace. The steady, unvarying song of the water tumbling over the wheel brought back the memories of his childhood, almost the sleep of childhood too.

At eight o'clock the next morning, Mrs. Flint found him breathing evenly in a heavy slumber. She stole out of the room. At nine, at ten, he was still asleep. Notwithstanding that he said he would have breakfast at half-past eight, she let him sleep on. She had seen the nervous tension in his eyes the night before and knew what was best for him. At half-past ten he was awake, saved from the mental collapse that had threatened him.

All that day he spent getting the new studio in the Mill ready for occupation. Young Harry interfered for the best part of the morning with a great show of assistance, until Mrs. Flint took him away, silently but firmly, against which there was no show of disobedience.

Dicky realised something then of a firmness and stability of her character from the way in which she managed his child, claiming obedience and getting

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love with it, the one inseparable from the other. The boy would have done anything for her.

"You've made that child your own," said he that evening as they sat alone talking after young Harry had went to bed.

"I have?" She looked up with a smile. "Do you mind?"

"Why should I?" he asked. "What right have I to mind? I've been no sort of a father to him."

"You weren't meant to be a father," she replied, "not to father your own child. I don't think it ever is the best type of man who does that. Leave it to the mother—that's her job. The man sets the example by the work he does in the world—that's his job. It's for the mother to tell the son to live up to it."

"You're consoling," said he with a smile; "it's a great rest to be here."

"And you needed it," said she.

That night he sat up till late making his will. He never knew the moment when the truth might leak out. How? That was impossible to say, but he never knew and was not such a fool as to deny the likelihood.

I leave all of which I die possessed to Mrs. Flint [he wrote], to be used by her at her discretion until my son, Harry, comes to the age of twenty-one, when it shall all pass into his possession with the exception of the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds a year to be retained by Mrs. Flint till her death.



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This document he took to Mr. Earnshaw, the solicitor, the next day, leaving instructions for it properly to be drawn out.

In a week's time he was at work again, putting forth the finest examples of his genius which, beyond even his portrait of Lady Diana, will last for all time in the memory of those who have seen them.

For now it was in his mind, as if he were working against time; not as yet with the dread suspicion of immediate discovery beating in sudden terror upon his brain, but consciously, realising that no man under such circumstances could count himself as safe.

Here then, as soon as that first week was passed and he was settled down once more to the quiet life of the Mill, he began the studio picture from that sketch which he had made of Lady Diana at Bembridge. Strictly speaking, this is not a portrait of her; but so clear were her features in the eye of his memory, so often had he drawn her in numberless poses and countless aspects, that she is there, recognisable by anyone. The figure itself was beautiful enough in any case, did it bear no likeness at all; but the landscape and the surrounding atmosphere, these are truly the joys of that picture to which even the graceful form of Lady Diana, silhouetted, yet in no depth of tone, against that glory of sky, is utterly subordinate.

It was, indeed, his imaginative treatment of landscape which makes his work comparable to that of Turner. Not that it resembles it, and yet in some



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measure there must have been a similarity in the extraordinary vision of their minds.

None of his pictures painted in those two years, and all within twenty miles of the neighbourhood of Bredon, amongst the Cotswold Hills, show you the country as you know it best, but as you have seen it on days of summer, dreaming, with eyes half closed, when all the reality of life is set behind you and, leaving your body, your spirit sets forth upon its own incomparable adventures.

Not one of those landscapes is recognisable as definitely of a certain spot. Here is, not the Avon you would say, speeding its path between the banks of Gloucestershire meadows, but a glorious, refulgent stream, which the Gods of Heaven might well descend to bathe in. In those last works of his, more than in any others, he shows that feeling for the allegorical personalities of trees of which he once had spoken to Mrs. Flint. His poplars are no poplars, but princesses in their gossamer gowns; his elms, indeed, are ploughmen, nobly blent in harmony with the soil they claim. The boughs of his oak trees are the arms of giants wielding clubs with which to fight the boldest human; the crests of his fir trees are nothing but the plumes of knights; you see their feathers fanning in the wind, you hear the clinking of their armour as they ride in their unbroken lines.

This was the work which for two years he had fretted to be doing. Here was an imagination which immeasurably surpassed his power of portraiture. He was, without doubt, the greatest idealist of his day.



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No mind in literature or music has conspired to touch the heights to which his fancy bore him. His genius transcends them all.

The prices he obtained for these pictures make poor comparisons with his portraits, but their value has increased, and will increase, to sums he would not have dreamed were possible. And all this time that he was working, day after day, seeming to need no rest, perhaps afraid to take it, no work, no message came from Lady Diana.

So far as the public was concerned, the excitement roused by the mystery of the death of Lord Freddy Charteris had died down. No more was heard of it in the papers. Men and women had been divorced since then, other murders had been committed, strange suicides with all their painful details had occupied the columns of the Press. They had made their few days' living out of it, and turned with no less vulgarity to something else.

Dicky had never spoken of it to Mrs. Flint; they had never even alluded to the confession he had made to her of his love for Lady Diana. Often he had wondered why she had not referred to it, knowing, as she must, that he had made one of the house-party for that week-end.

Had he known the true reason of her silence, he would have marvelled the more.

She had seen the halfpenny daily paper publishing the portraits of those visitors to Bembridge. Word by word she had read the account of it all, the sudden inexplicable death of this man who from



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all accounts of his intoxication she divined must be one of little virtue, deserving of but little regard. Someone in the house must have killed Lord Freddy, she read, and knowing what she did of his love for Diana, struggled in her soul against the suspicion that Dicky was the one.

Indeed, she had conquered, asking herself again and again how could it be he. The man she loved had not those vile attributes, however deep, however passionate his love for a woman might be. So, by the time he had returned to the Mill, Mrs. Flint had cleansed her mind of all these ugly suspicions.

But that first night, as she unpacked his things, lifting the dressing-gown he had worn at Bembridge from the top of his trunk, she saw a stain upon the sleeve. It was the tidy housewife merely who regarded it with interest. How was it to be removed? She dipped a sponge in water and rubbed it on the sleeve. The water dripping from it then was brownish red. Before suspicion was aroused, and yet with growing eagerness, she rubbed again, then dropped the garment of a sudden at her feet.

It was blood.

Then all the old suspicions swift came leaping back. The stain would not come out. With an abrupt decision, as though no time were to be lost, she took the garment to her room and locked the door. There, as Lady Diana with her handkerchief had done, she cut it up in pieces and burnt it in the fireplace, her heart beating at the sound of every footstep in the



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house, feeling that she now was an accomplice to a dreadful deed.

The very next day Dicky had inquired for it.

"I dropped it in your hip-bath yesterday," said she. "I was drying it before a fire in my room and it caught alight. There was no saving it. You couldn't have worn it again."

"I'm not sorry," he had replied. "It was a beastly thing; I always hated it."

She said no more, understanding that hatred, yet still believing, deeper than the depths of her suspicions, in all the noble qualities of the man she loved. So she had said nothing of that tragedy at Bembridge, only waiting in her mind for that moment when he should tell her everything, but knowing there was yet everything to tell.

It was not until the studio portrait of Lady Diana was finished, some months after he had returned to Bredon; not even until, without a word, he had sent it to her in Hans Crescent as he had promised, that Dicky received any communication. There came a letter then in her hand-writing—the black-edged envelope, the black coronet.

Seeing it on his plate at breakfast, Mrs. Flint left the room before he came down; left him alone with what she knew must be a fateful epistle to him.

"I am coming down to the Mill to see you," it read, having no other beginning than this, addressing him with no endearment. There followed the approximate hour of her arrival. She was coming by motor, driving herself, she said. Only her name

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—Diana—at the foot of this communication was to show that it came from her.

Slowly Dicky tore it up in little pieces and threw it in the grate.

She knows, he thought. But how much did she know, and how had she known at all? And if she knew, then why not others? And if others—? He left his breakfast untouched and went straight to the studio, trying to cast himself into his work. It was not to be done. The paint was not alive; it would not move for him. In despair, he threw down his brushes and went out. Up on the slopes of Bredon Hill he found himself, where they had first met. There for an hour and more he sat, going back along the path of his life, incident by incident, until that moment.

There was very little in it all he would have changed, only the great issue, that she should have loved him well enough. Now all that he fretted for was the time in which to work. If Diana knew, and others knew, what time had he left? He rose from where he was sitting, conscious of the first sensations of his pursuit. Fate, if not the law, he felt, was casting its shadow on the ground before his feet. How long before the actual moment when it should lay its hand upon his shoulder? It was not fear he felt; but he could not longer sit there in the stillness of that day.

In a state of feverish unrest he set off to the oak tree where, those many years ago, he and Anne had built their hiding-place. One plank of it, after all



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that time remained, a simple piece of wood that flooded his mind with memories, and one amongst and above them all, catching his imagination, flinging away this fever that threatened him.

It was there in that hiding-place that he had contemplated his first great picture—"Romance." There, with the blank sheet of paper before him, he had created a great idea, there without a stroke of his brush he had acknowledged the utter failure of his achievement.

Things were different now. All the optimism, all the idealism in him rose to the thought of what he could do now. That—! Before the end! His picture of Romance, which should mean Romance as long as hearts were beating, as long as men were stirred to adventure in the world, or women felt the pulse of love.

He returned straight to the Mill, renewed in strength, with fresh invigoration. But those few hours alone upon the hill had been as years in Dicky's life. He came back an older man. Even Mrs. Flint could see the change in him, the set determination which grimly had settled about his lips. It was all the better, she thought; and was not much at fault.

The next day came Lady Diana, arriving at half-past twelve. Dicky stood out on the road expecting her and when he saw the rising dust above the hedges, felt his lips go dry. All his blood chilled as though this were the coming of his Fate to overtake him.

"Dicky," she said—her first words as he stood

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there, opening the door for her to descend—"you've been ill!"

"Not I," said he. "I've never done so much work in my life. Why?"

"You've changed. Your face has changed."

"It might well do that," said he.

The car was put away into the yard behind the Mill. He took her into the house and introduced her to Mrs. Flint, Diana little knowing how deeply that firm yet gentle woman's heart was wrapped about the interests of the man they both had loved; indeed, they both loved still.

Before lunch, having said no word of Lord Freddy as yet, he showed her the studio; set burning again the old light in his eyes as he brought out his pictures for her to see. She was amazed.

"That one you sent," said she, "I'd thought that the best you'd ever done. The landscape was wonderful. But these! My dear boy—what a marvellous genius and what a perfectly beautiful mind you've got. Does the country really seem like that to you? It's fairyland! The vileness of the world after that!"

He stood there listening quietly to her praise, passionately to her endearments. "Why?" he asked himself. "Why this—and that letter?"

"You never told me your price for the picture," she went on. "My goodness, what it will be worth one of these days. I've had the sketch framed. It's in my bedroom—as I said it should be—reminding me—" she struggled with her emotion. "Why didn't you tell me the price of it?"



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"There is no price," he replied. "I'd promised it to you."

"Yes, I know that, in a mad, a wonderful moment. But you've given up your portraits now. You must live."

"I'm living this instant," said he. "Don't talk any more about prices—they don't worry me now. Come in to lunch. I've got the best I could for you."

CHAPTER XXV

MRS. FLINT knew her presence would be an intrusion. They had lunch alone. And still nothing was said of Lord Freddy. It was not until they had returned to the studio again after the meal that Diana, heart beating and with a dull sickness in her throat, found courage to speak of it.

"Dicky," she began, "there's something I want to say to you. I've come specially to say it. You've guessed that."

"Yes—I've guessed it," said he.

Here again she hung upon her words, trouble filling her eyes as she looked at him. She was afraid. Was there shame in that? She was afraid.

"Go on," he said quietly, far more possessed of himself than she. "Say it all, my dear."

She broke into it quickly, running with her words.

"You remember that morning they found—Freddy—in the smoking-room. The first thing Hills did was to send for me. I came alone—in my dressing-

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gown, just as I was. I was asleep. I got out of bed to come down there. Then I sent Hills for Willie Gerrish. I felt powerless to do anything by myself. Is it to be wondered at? I wasn't afraid, but I—I couldn't act. Hills went, and there I was—alone. What's the good of saying all I thought about—you—a thousand things. I couldn't remember them. But there I was—alone—with him. And, then, Dicky—before Willie Gerrish came down—I—I found something."

She stopped. This was the moment. Breathlessly, with every nerve strained to leap it when it came, it was as though the speed of her speech had failed her. Her voice broke. She sat there looking at him.

"You found what?" he asked quietly. Something that proved his presence in that room; that he could guess. But what?

"Your handkerchief, caught underneath his body—soaked—" she struggled with her voice again—"soaked with blood."

Dicky stood looking at her with a steady gaze, pitying her, scarcely conscious of himself, pitying her for the shock of what that must have been.

"And what did you think?" he asked. "What have you thought since? What do you think now?"

"What can I think? I've never known life so terrible as it has been these last few months. It's been Hell on earth to me. What could I think, Dicky? That you had lent him your handkerchief; that you had lent it to the person, whoever it was,



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who—who had killed him. But these last few months and your terrible silence, every day adding the fear of suspicion to my mind.”

“Have you kept the handkerchief?” he inquired. “Have you given it to—the police? What have you done with it?”

“Given it to the police! How could you think that? I took it to my room that very morning, the first opportunity. I burnt it. All the ashes I hid in the chimney. That handkerchief can never be found.”

He leant forward and took her hand.

“You cared then,” he murmured, “even after that—even with those suspicions?”

“Of course I cared—but, Dicky, how did it come there?”

“I used it,” he replied slowly. “I used it to mop up the blood from his wound. I suppose I didn’t quite know what I was doing, because I knew then he was dead. I’d lost grip of things for a minute. That’s why I forgot it, I expect.”

“You—you killed him then?”

Fear and horror beset her mind, yet she was still conscious of the necessity to drop her voice to an almost inaudible whisper.

“I killed him, Diana; yes—I—I did,” and then he told her all the story of that night at Bembridge. She broke the contact of his narrative with an exclamation again and again. “The brute!” she cried—and once the word she had admitted in secret to herself soon after they were wed—“Oh, the cad! The contemptible cad!”



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But she listened with parted lips, picturing it all in that smoking-room at Bembridge, just as he told it her.

"But that was not murder!" she exclaimed when he had done.

"No; my conscience is clear about that. My blood was up—I struck harder than I meant to. I admit that. And then, if he hadn't ducked his head—there was the element of chance in it all—Fate or some such thing. It was all chance that I left my cigarettes there; chance again that I needed them."

"But why didn't you wake up the house—let us all know then, the moment that it was done? Dicky, what a fool you've been!"

He could smile at that.

"Have I?" said he. "How about Sir Anthony?" He recounted to her then that first interview with the old gentleman in the smoking-room. "Can't you see," he concluded, "the old fellow would have spoken? No one was there to hear my story out. Who would have believed, knowing I was in love with you, that it was an accident? Not a soul! Not a single soul! And you probably suspected of complicity. My God! Don't you see the situation as it was to me then?"

She stared at him, trying to realise that anyone could so sacrifice himself.

"You did it for me?" she murmured.

"Who else?" said he. "Your hatred of publicity—those damned newspapers with their filthy pictures. If you couldn't have faced it with love to bear you



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out, how much more this terrible suspicion that you had known what was to be done. There's no charity taught to the public by these rags of the Press. They only breed the lowest and most morbid suspicions in the minds of those who read them. Weren't they bad enough as it was? Yes; it was for you. Besides, the chances were a thousand to one that no one would ever know. Sir Anthony had seen me go to bed, so had Hills. Oh, I thought of myself, too; but my first instinct was to do what you said. I rang the bell and never a soul in the house woke up. Then I thought of you."

She sat silently contemplating it all, incapable of realising anything now but the magnitude of what he had done for her. The risk he was running now was of the utmost that might befall him. After this period of silence who would believe the truth? Supposing anyone but she had discovered that handkerchief. Her heart was sick at the thought of it. Supposing Sir Anthony yet should speak. She would make a point of strengthening their friendship when she returned to town. His silence should be bought. She must do something for Dicky now. He had done everything for her.

Looking up at him at length, she asked what was to be done.

"Done?" said he. "There's nothing to be done."

"Not—not you and I?" she whispered. "Do you think I haven't thought of those shores of the Adriatic all these months?"

He shook his head.



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"That's too late now, my dear," said he. "The sun doesn't shine down there and the waters aren't blue for us. Some other lucky devils have the joy of that. You can't join your fortunes to those of a man who at any moment might be arrested for the murder of one who was your husband. Sir Anthony might speak yet. A thousand things might let the secret out. You don't think the police are sitting quietly content with mystery."

But there was him, she said, what could he do? She had a thousand arguments that a woman's love can find to fill the need.

"Are you to stay here alone," she cried, "and bear it all?"

He gave no answer in words to that, but strode to a curtain hanging close against the wall. Behind it was a canvas seven foot by five. He dragged it out and stood it there for her to see. Not a fleck of paint was on it. There it was, virgin white, waiting for the first touches of his brush.

"What is it?" she asked.

"My new picture," said he, "'Romance,' that's what I've got to do. I sha'n't be alone. Don't you worry about me."

Now she broke into tears. He took her in his arms and let her sob them out.

"Don't you worry," he whispered; "don't you worry about me, my dear. You said yourself once I'd given you up for my work; well, here it is, and all that I can do of it. Perhaps they'll never come for me. Perhaps I'll go right on to the end. You



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come and see me sometimes—come and see what I'm doing. A word from you is worth the praise of thirty thousand critics. Come away from here now. It's no good our talking about this any more. Come and see my boy and do this for me—if the worst should come he'll need some help beyond what this dearest of creatures, this Mrs. Flint, can give him. Influence'll help him then. Will you bestir yourself to get him that?"

She just nodded her head. Had there been any words to say, she could not have said them.

Young Harry came then, hanging tightly on to Mrs. Flint's hand. With quick eyes Diana saw in him what Dicky in his youth had been. So small a thing as that could bring the lump into her throat again. She took his face in both her hands and kissed him, then turned away to the door.

"I've got to be going," she said bravely. "You know it'll take me more than four hours to get back. I sha'n't be in till after seven."

As Dicky stood beside the car again she leant nearer to his side.

"I shall say everything there is to say, Dicky," she whispered, "if—if the worst should come."

"That worst will never come," said he quietly.

Her eyes looked her fear. She ask him what he meant. He took a little bottle from his pocket and showed it her.

"I sha'n't go through the folly of a trial," said he. "I'm quite prepared for that. The worst you think of will never come. Don't think of it. Think of



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my working here, my picture—'Romance'—all our love in it—all you've taught me. Oh, my dear, good-bye."

CHAPTER XXVI

THAT winter slipped quickly away into another spring and Dicky's picture was not begun. Interruptions followed one upon another. In the North, where by reason of his "Meeting of the Creditors" he was held in great repute, they selected him to paint the mural decorations in a vast public building, at that time just erected. For a month or so he stayed there, catching the spirit of industry, ultimately turning their foundries and their workshops into things of beauty—such beauty as they had never seen in them before. The quality of idealism was in everything he did. He taught them to be proud of their smoking chimneys and their belching furnaces.

Those mural paintings spoke to them as no man had ever spoken to them of their black country before.

"This is not dirt," Dicky had said to them. "Not the sort of grime they talk of in their white-washed villas in the South. This is the dust of labour—rising in magnificent clouds, like the dust of an army into the blue of heaven."

This he had said in his paintings. He said as much again in words when they entertained him at a big dinner before he left—cotton merchants, iron-



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founders, all sitting there listening to this young man talking of the beauty of their lives, when they had thought they must go to those genteel people in the South for that.

"There's a whole scale of beauty," he said to them, standing at that huge table fingering his knife and fork with nervousness, just as Mr. Nibbs had done at his wedding party, "and yours are the deep and sonorous notes that have all their own beautiful vibrations. I don't care what you make up here in the North—it may be women's petticoats or it may be coats of mail—so long as you make them well there will be beauty somewhere in the work you do."

And when he sat down there were their glasses thumping on the table, their spoons rattling in their coffee-cups. Diana would have been proud of him then.

Of all the commissions for portraits he received he accepted but one. This was that portrait of Lord Allingham, the old Lord Chief Justice, in his eighty-fifth year. In the wrinkled eyes, still alight in the energy, the fettered energy of life, you can see all the depth and breadth of his experience. There was a man under whose observation had passed all the crime, the meanness, the chicanery of life, yet who retained in himself the still unshaken belief in human nature. It twinkled in his eye, that eye which still was judicial in its steady regard.

The old man spoke to him of the murder of Lord Freddy. Dicky tightened his nerves as he worked,



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feeling how implacable would be the justice offered him by such a man.

"She'll marry again," the old judge had continued; "and it'll be a good thing for her."

But the summer came round again and there was no such news of Diana as this. Twice a year she came down to Bredon to see his work, bringing each time some present for young Harry, taking away with her a still greater opinion of Dicky and his work.

In those days—indeed, as always—he eschewed public life. They came in time to know in London that he was not for their societies or their entertainments; would saddle himself with none of the public responsibilities of an artist's life.

The truth was he knew he had no time for them, even if they had appealed to the vanity which persuades the majority of men to do these things. Ever since that morning when he had sat on the hillside before Diana's arrival, the sense of unrest had been steadily growing in his mind. A year and a half had gone by and the great picture—"Romance"—was not yet begun. That winter he chafed more than ever for the return of the spring when he might begin, for the fear was gradually creeping into all his thoughts that it might be too late.

Such a strain as that must have been, was swiftly leaving its mark upon him. Day by day age seemed to be settling in his face. Mrs. Flint noticed the grey hairs already collecting on his temples.

In the long winter evenings, while the wind from



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the North was hurling the rain-drops against the window-pane, he would sit over the fire trying to read, or sketching with his pencil—always ideas for that one great picture he was hoping to do when the spring came back again.

Whatever it was, with every fresh, deafening gust of wind, shaking the house as though it were in the hands and at the mercy of some giant thing, he would stop in what he was doing, look up and sigh, with that breath which strives in vain to lift a heavier load than it can well afford.

One night, after a three-days' storm, when the elm trees had been blown down in the meadows, tearing them up by their roots and felling them there like men slain upon a battlefield, Mrs. Flint sat over her sewing but watching Dicky as he tried in vain to read.

It seemed almost he had forgotten her presence there in the room for, with a sudden shrieking of the wind, he laid down his book upon his knee and stared into the fire, muttering, "Oh, my God!" below his breath.

She heard the exclamation, and slowly but deliberately she put aside her work, came to his chair and knelt there, down on the floor beside him.

"Dicky," she said, "do you remember promising me that you'd tell me everything—good or bad?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, tell me now. What's the matter?"

"Nothing, only my work. This weather, these days, kill it. I can't move till the spring comes.



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There's no Romance in this, this ceaseless, downpour from skies like lead. We haven't seen a glint of light in the sky for three days. Spring seems such an age away. I sometimes wonder how I can wait for it. Oh, my God! That first sight of a daffodil and a blue sky!"

"But there's something else, Dicky," she persisted. "I—I know there's something else."

"You know? How do you know?"

"We've had these winters before. Once you could find them worth looking at, these grey skies. It isn't only that."

She took his hand, forced him to look into her eyes. "What is it?" she repeated.

He stared at her as one asking how much she could bear. For the longing to tell someone was with him then. The burden of that secret in that silent house was more leaden upon his spirits than the skies outside. She answered quickly enough that gaze of his.

"I don't mind what it is," said she. "I've guessed so many things, and I could help you bear it better if I only knew."

He brought a footstool, setting her there before him, took both her hands, and told her as it had happened, the utmost truth of it. All her tears she caught back as she listened. Not one of them would she let him see. This was no moment for weeping, but for strength to add to his.

When the whole story of it was finished, he leant back in his chair with the deepest sigh of all, as



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if indeed then the weight had lifted from his mind.

"Lord, what selfish things we are," he muttered; "the relief I feel, now that you know it, too!"

"I'd known it, Dicky," she whispered. "I'd known it all the time."

She told him then about the dressing-gown—the stain of blood—the first unfounded suspicions built up in conviction on such frail proof as that.

He leant forward and took her face in his hands.

"What marvellous creatures you women are. Think of all the things you've done for me," he said. "Yet here I am, asking one more?"

"What?"

"Help me to get this winter through till we have spring again."

She did help him. None could have done it so well. With all the thousand little cunning tricks a woman has at her finger-ends she occupied his mind: complained of the ignorance of young Harry who had not yet been sent to school, put it upon his duty to his son to first instruct him. She taught herself Patience with cards. During those long evenings they played together. Without appreciating it, his mind was occupied despite itself.

Then one morning, late in January, having written up to London some time before, she found a parcel brought to her by post. This, with the nervous fingers of a loving hand, she opened in her haste.

When Dicky came down to breakfast he found a



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bunch of daffodils set out in a china bowl on the clean white tablecloth.

CHAPTER XXVII

THEIR own daffodils came out in the grass in time. When once the skies had begun their clearing, spring sped along to the softer twilights; birds began their pairing, the cherry blossom came and fell, the apple blossom took its place.

In the evenings from his studio window Dicky could now see Mrs. Flint bending down on the garden paths over the flower beds, young Harry near at hand with a spade made for his wielding.

The first tulips were dropping their scented petals when "Romance" was begun; the last tulips in May were full in bloom when he found the end of it in sight. Every morning Mrs. Flint came up to see it in the studio, convinced, if from the way he spoke of it alone, that it was the greatest thing he had yet done.

But it needed no words of his. She could see the beauty of it for herself. It was a mass of light. The glamour of the world as when you see it with the beating sun upon your eyes.

It seemed you stood upon a hillside looking down into a golden valley where the pattern of a glittering river spun a thread of silver till it lost it in the sun. You knew there were broad meadows there, cool and luscious, with their long, deep grass; you knew the elm trees were in full leaf, the willows



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turning silver leaves to every breath of wind; but only the river could you surely see, unwinding its silver thread—all else was blinded from your eyes by the bewildering light.

For the one instant you might just trace the golden beauties of the valley far below, but the next your eyes were drawn away into the full burning brilliance of the sun.

To paint that sunlight and without the assisting contrast of one note of shadow in it all; to fill a seven-foot canvas with such sunlight as deceived you that your eyes must blink at it, this was an achievement to have striven for indeed.

In the front of the picture, just before you as you stood upon the hill, two dragon flies were circling in the heat and burden of the sun. In that dazzling light their wings were flashing like brilliant opals, red and blue and gold and green, all blurred yet dazzling with their countless motions as they flew.

Here was romance, the very spirit of it, rather than the thing itself. As you gazed at it, to the meaning of your mind, the yearnings of romance were stirred in you. No power was left to you to say: "That's not my idea of what romance should be." It was the essence of it, and made the quality alive in you.

To every single one who saw it, that picture must have brought its different inward view. None beheld it alike; to all it conjured different visions and wove a different dream. I have never heard anyone agree upon the effect it produced in them.

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It was on a blue morning in June that Dicky announced to Mrs. Flint how he was on the verge of its completion.

"To-morrow will see the last stroke on it," he said. "You mustn't come up to-day. Wait till to-morrow and see it then."

A moment later he picked up the newspaper from the table—no requirement of his in the household, but taken by Mrs. Flint. To save her from being quite a fool, she said.

As he opened it, two pictures, conspicuous on the page, caught hold upon his eye. She saw him look; she saw the moment's suffering in his face.

"What is it?" she asked fearfully as he laid it down.

"A memory of the Charteris mystery," he said slowly. "That's the heading."

"To what—? What does it say?"

"Lady Diana is engaged to be married to Sir William Gerrish."

He said no more; rose from the table, left his food untouched, and went out of the room.

That same morning in London, Sir Anthony Hopwood picked up his daily paper; in the same way put it down.

"My dear," he said to his wife, "do you know what's happened?"

"What?"

"Lady Diana has become engaged to that fellow Gerrish."

"I thought she was going to marry that young

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painter man," she said, "when all that trouble had died out."

"So I thought," said Sir Anthony slowly. "I wonder why she hasn't?"

It was but two mornings later that Dicky climbed slowly up to his studio to put the last touches to "Romance." There was little to be done; just those slight things that bring the last finish to work already done.

He was standing back from his easel, knowing the last brush stroke had been made, thinking, now I'll tell Mrs. Flint—she can see.

And then he said aloud, "All that she taught me," and laughed a laugh that broke its bitterness and fell to silence as he heard the clanking of the wicket-gate.

Some thought perhaps that it might be her, Diana, come to explain the thing he already understood, brought him quickly to the window. He looked out.

There below him on the path were two men. One raised his head and Dicky's heart stood on the instant still. It was the detective he had seen at Bembridge. Beside him stood a police officer in uniform.

He turned quickly away, for a moment gazing at his picture.

"Now—" he said aloud.

As though from force of habit, he took his palette and scraped the paint away, wiped his brushes and



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stood them in their jars. Then slowly his hand went to his pocket.

He took the little bottle out and looked at it, then in acceptance of the thing he knew must be, slowly turned back his eyes to the easel where his picture stood.

There was his work—done.



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